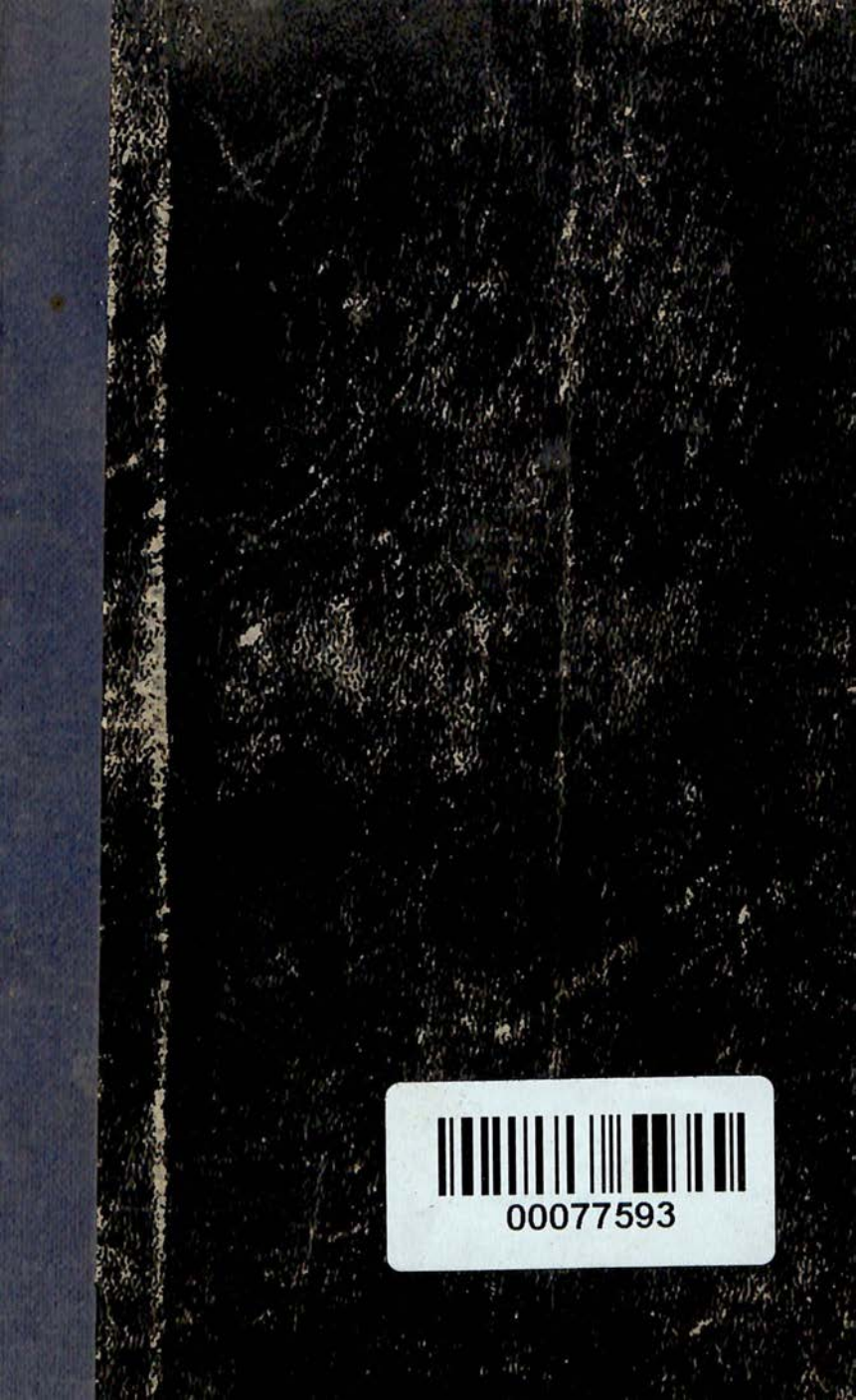

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STRANGE SECRETS.

" When, fain to learn, we lean into the dark,
And grope to feel the floor of the abyss,
Or find the secret boundary-lines which mark
Where soul and matter kiss—
Fair world! these puzzled souls of ours grow weak
With beating their bruised wings against the rim
That bounds their utmost flying, when they seek
The distant and the dim.

" We pant, we strain like birds against their wires;
Are sick to reach the vast and the beyond:
And what avails if still to our desires
Those far-off gulfs respond?
Contentment comes not therefore; still there lies
An outer distance when the first is hailed,
And still for ever yawns before our eyes
An UTMOST—that is veiled.

JEAN INGELO


00077593

STRANGE SECRETS

TOLD BY

PERCY FITZGERALD, FLORENCE MARRYAT

DUTTON COOK, JAMES GRANT

ETC.



EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS BY SIR JOHN GILBERT, WILLIAM SMALL, W. J. HENNESSY, ETC.

London
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STRANGE SECRETS.

THE SECRET OF SWALECLIFFE CASTLE.

I.

TIGER KING.

HOME again! Oh, the joy of it, after five years across the seas! It is worth going round the world, as I had done, if only for the pleasure of coming back to your starting-point. I never appreciated old Aunt Marianne till after she died, and I never knew how fond I was of Eversfold till absence had estranged us. I had been wild to leave it, but now on my return journey, from Paris onwards, I felt consumed by a longing for the green lanes, copses, furze commons of Surrey. Four interminable hours must I wait in London for the Cross Hills train. Whilst impatiently pacing the Strand I stumbled on an acquaintance recently picked up abroad. I hesitated before speaking, for though the man and his family had been cordiality itself to me in Rome, I knew the difference different longitude makes sometimes. Not for jovial, hospitable old Matthew Parker, Esq. His first question now was the last he had put to me before parting on the Piazza di Spagna:

"When are you coming to Swalecliffe? The workmen are out at last, and we're nice and snug. Tuesday's our

house-warming. You promised to be there. My ladies will never forgive me if I let you off."

"I'm homeward bound now, to my mother," I replied, "but I'll run down for the ball." What's two hundred miles to a man who has just put twenty thousand behind him?

"Here's my card—Swalecliffe Castle. Book to Wood End, Great Western line. Don't forget."

I pocketed the card and speedily forgot all about him, whirling towards Eversfold. At dusk I alighted at Cross Hills station, two miles distant. Five years bring changes. I see a new guard who knows not Francis Milford, the new station-master touches not his hat. The servant my mother has sent to meet me is new, and we eye each other askance awhile ere agreeing to infer we are master and man.

He takes my luggage. I prefer to walk by the fields. I shall reach home almost as soon as the carriage; and I like to recall the way, step by step, and note the changes.

I count several, not all for the better. That's a new roadside tavern; those thatched cottages have grown slated roofs, that patch of common has been inclosed. That gate of old Glover's has *not* been repaired. Ha, ha, a miser's economy! Here I know every stick on this hedge. That's where the nightshade grows—there the spindle-berries, that's where Jemmy King and I found a sedge-warbler's nest.

The footpath led presently into a lane, half a mile from our village. As I crossed the stile, a man's figure I fancied I had seen on leaving the station, dropped over a gate into the lane from the other side of the hedge. Seeing me, he retreated; I walked on, but heard him following at some distance. A peculiar, shrinking hesitation in his gait started suspicions. He was poorly clad, wore his hat slouched over his eyes, and carried a thick stick. I had only a light umbrella, and a valuable watch and chain temptingly exposed. The spot was entirely lonely, so, preferring to have my tramp in front of me, I stepped aside on the rising bank as though to survey the distant village,

and waited for him to pass. He stood still. Objecting to be dogged thus I turned back, to pass him, and so doing stared him sternly in the face. My misgivings died in a burst of laughter.

"Why, Jemmy, man," I shouted cheerily, "yourself, as I'm alive! The first of the old faces I've seen yet. And of all changed things you've changed most for the worst," I mentally added. Was this pale, thin, impoverished-looking being my sturdy, prosperous young farmer of five years back? He and his crops might have failed conceivably, but there was further about him a queer nervous shrinking from scrutiny so unnatural to his former self that it startled me as might the sight of burrs growing on an orange tree.

"You've been ill, old chap," I said. "What can a friend do to set you afloat? You've one more in England than you had yesterday, you know."

My greeting seemed simply to confound him. "Master Frank," he faltered unsteadily.

Jemmy King and I had been sworn comrades from seven to seventeen, and fast friends still when, at two and twenty, I sailed for the States.

"Shake hands, man," I continued, seizing the hand he would not offer, "come along, and you tell me about everybody. How's the parson, and that old miser, Sampson Glover, and his scapegrace of a nephew, and pretty Rose Evans whom I left you all courting, and would have courted too, had I seen a chance for myself——"

I checked my rash volley of questions. His face turned livid, his features were distorted with passion, and I recollected Jem's tremendous temper, which had won him at school the nickname of Tiger King; once, too, when we were boys and I provoked him to a fight, his onslaught was so terrific that I still felt a reminder in my shoulder.

"Damnation!" he shouted. "Are you mad, to talk so to me?"

"I think *you* are," I retorted. "Is that how you welcome a man back?"

Eyeing me askance defiantly, "Don't you know?" he said sullenly.

"Know what? my mother never tells me anything. Come on, you tell me."

He shook off my arm fiercely. He was Tiger King again. Disregarding me, he stepped upon the bank to strain his eyes through the trees at the red-tiled church tower, the school-house gables, and thatched barns of Eversfold.

"Cursed fool that I was," he burst out, "to come in sight of the old place—except I'd a knife to lay across my throat here and make an end!"

"Jemmy," I exclaimed, concerned, "what in thunder's amiss? Tell me, and I swear I'll set it straight."

"They'll tell you yonder," he said, "and no living man can set it straight."

"Old pal," I said, at my wits' end, "you've had trouble—that's enough for me to know. If purse or hand can give you a lift, why there's no use I'd sooner put mine to. I'm up in the world just now, but the luck may change, and I know you'd do the same if our places were reversed. Auld lang syne's the word between you and me."

Just for one moment his countenance relaxed, but resisting the feeling he answered shortly:

"I've money to take me where I'm bound."

"Where is that?"

"To the Colorado mines. The 'Cambria' sails to-night, and I go with her. Dead or alive, sink or swim, you'll hear no more of Jemmy King." And with that he turned and ran, and the bend in the lane hid him from sight.

Pained and perplexed, I went on my way; but as I neared home the personal pleasure I felt in returning drowned other sensations, and presently I forgot everything in the arms of my mother, the least changed of all remembered things. You must imagine that meeting, the rush of talk, the eager interchange of questions that filled the first hours. Not until after dinner, in the sudden lull that comes at dessert, when the servants have gone, and the

clatter of plates has ceased, did my thoughts revert to that strange encounter, and I instantly began:

"By the way, mother, walking up I met Jemmy King. Never saw anybody so changed in my life. I should hardly have known him."

My mother was placidity itself, by nature, habit and principle, but my announcement electrified her. The very ribbons and laces of her cap seemed flustered.

"James King here?" she ejaculated in dismay.

"Yes; on Shooter's Hill. What on earth has befallen him?"

"Shooter's Hill? Then they've let him out. Gracious Heaven! How unsafe."

"Out of where?" I asked mystified. "Has he been in a lunatic asylum?"

"In Dartmoor prison," she replied gravely.

"Jemmy King?" I thundered indignantly, springing up. "You're joking. What for?"

"He half murdered a man, that was all," she returned.

My shoulder twinged. I was answered, but ready to swear Jem's victim deserved his fate.

"It must have been under extreme provocation," I said. "Who was the man?"

"Poor Mick Glover, old Sampson's nephew."

"Mick was always a confoundedly insolent fellow," I said, inclined to make excuses for my old chum, whatever the atrocity into which he had been betrayed. My mother naturally resented such laxity.

"Dear Frank, it is easy to see you are fresh from the land of bowies, revolvers, and lynch-law," she said. "That your neighbour is provoking scarcely justifies you in setting upon him in a lonely field, and knocking the life out of him to the best of your ability."

"Mick must have been *very* aggravating," I said. My mother lost patience, and I apologised. "I can't take it in all at once, or get over it. You know Jemmy and I were like brothers. What was the quarrel about?"

"What, indeed, but that pretty, silly lass, Rose Evans," sighed my mother; and reluctantly I seemed to take in everything now. Before I left, gossip whispered there was something between farmer King and blacksmith Evans's pretty daughter. But handsome, dare-devil Mick was a dangerous rival for any swain—wild no doubt, but ladies of every degree overlooked his vagaries, or laid the blame of them on the tradesmen he fleeced, the uncle he sponged upon, the girls he ruined, on every one but Mick himself.

"When King discovered Mick was courting Rose," she continued, "he spoke ill of him to Evans, who forbade the girl to meet him again. Mick, stung to madness, talked lightly of her before King at the 'Cricketers.' High words passed, and the landlord had to interfere. King left in a fury, vowing to murder Mick next time he crossed his path. Mick was advised not to walk home alone, but he started off fearlessly. It was a bright, moonlight night, the other met him by the old chestnut tree in Elmer's field, struck him down and left him for dead. It was a dastardly revenge, for Mick had no thoughts of fighting."

"Jem can't have been sober," I suggested, falling back on the Englishman's pet universal extenuation.

"Neither is the collier who tramples on his wife. King thought he was safe and his victim's mouth was shut, but Mick lived to testify to his would-be murderer."

Unable to defend the culprit, I fell to hitting at his victim.

"And how fares it with our village Lovelace? Is the measure of his mischief yet full?"

"His uncle died soon after, leaving his money to a distant relation. Mick was too free with it to please him. Poor fellow; he had a little of his own, but was in difficulties when he left. He has not been heard of here since."

"And Rose Evans?" I asked.

"Is Rose Evans still. She is not so pretty as she was, but she has had a lesson. The lads don't come round her as they used, but she is better fitted to make an honest man's wife, and since Mrs. Evans died she has devoted her-

self heart and soul to her old father. But, really, Frank, if King is lurking about on ticket-of-leave, I think the police should be informed."

"No fear, mother. I saw him posting back to catch the Southampton express. He sails for America to-night. May he prosper over there as I have done!"

A forlorn hope. Unto him that hath—capital and connections—will be given. But Jemmy had nothing but a tarnished name.

II.

ROSE EVANS.

PLEASANT, waking in one's old room—first time for five years. I had slept in queer places meantime—half-built shanties, savages' huts, on a tavern table—and the return to a bed-chamber, crammed with comforts and reminiscences of the halcyon boyhood of a widow's only son, was disturbing. Had I not dreamt the interval? Was I really five years older?

After breakfast came a long talk with my mother, then the longest walk she ever took—to and from the kitchen garden—then lunch, then a drive, then tea, then I wrote a note to Parker to excuse myself from my engagement, which struck me now in the light of a bore; then feeling as though I should die if I sat still much longer, I pleaded the impossibility of doing justice to the fatted calf at dinner unless I first took a walk. My mother smiled and acquiesced, and I strolled down to the village, as we called the dozen cottages of the scattered hamlet of Eversfold, that clustered hard by the church, each with its small garden, like a large nosegay.

A co-operative store, superseding the old ginger-beer and lolly-pop shop, is a novelty, but looks languishing already. The school-house stands as of yore, but has acquired a

bumptious air that savours of School Board activity. The older rustics have not altered a hair, of course. It takes more than five years, or fifteen, or twenty, to make visible impression on village sexton or clerk. They greeted me pleasantly, but seemed unaware that I had been away any time.

"There's blacksmith Evans' cottage—mustn't forget *not* to ask after his wife. And there—yes, by Jove—there's his pretty Rose at the door!"

In her dark stuff dress, white cambric apron, and plain cap, she stood, stooping to take the can from the milkman's boy. "Oh, mother, you were wrong," I was thinking. "She's prettier than ever!"

How shall I describe that girl? She was not angelic-looking, nor fairy-like, nor queen-like. She was tall and well-built, with a pretty small head with plenty of thick glossy brown hair upon it—and small features. Neither form, colouring, nor expression, taken separately, was striking, but the whole penetrated you slowly but surely. Her throat was really beautiful, and the dimples on her cheek were to blame for much. It was a placid, still-water style of beauty, and owed its hold partly to your surprise in finding after the first that this demure young person, whom you stupidly mistook for a puppet, had a will and a way of her own. It made smarter, coquettish girls wild to see the men, without exception, desert them to crowd round quiet Rose Evans. Seeing her stand there to-day, so neat, and spruce, and complacent—Rose was not one to undervalue herself—I vehemently resented the calamity she had caused. Never could I forgive her that mischief. She had flirted with that good-looking, fascinating reprobate, Mick, and driven a better man to what by mere chance had not turned out murder. "Serve you right, Miss Rose, if you never get married at all," was my silent masculine invective, as the worst I could hurl. But she looked so fresh, so pretty, and innocent, that my tone as I accosted her sounded less distant than I had intended to make it.

"Good afternoon," said I. "Have you forgotten me quite?"

"Not quite," she said, with the least little smile and blush —Rose was for moderation in all things—"but it was such a surprise. Won't you come in, sir? Father'll be home from the forge directly, and ever so pleased to see you."

I followed her into the kitchen, watching her as she stepped into the larder to set down the milk, her tucked-up sleeves showing her rounded, plump arms. There was certainly a demoniacal attraction about that girl. Then again, as I marked her nice-fitting dress and smooth plaits, her looks—not a day older at twenty-three than at eighteen, just as if nothing had ever interfered with her rest—the kitchen with its spotless brick floor and shining pots and pans (the Evanses were comfortably off), I thought of poor ruined Jem and his lot—black-balled, friendless, fighting a hostile world for a broken existence, and my acrimony returned.

"How long is it? Five years?" she asked.

"Long enough to turn the world upside down for some that I know," I replied. She never stirred a feature. Seated under the window-lattice, sewing, she made a pretty Dutch-like picture. "She's lymphatic," I thought. "I needn't be shy of alluding to past events. It's been up with some, and down with others," I added pointedly.

"It's been 'up' with you," Miss Rose retorted.

"I won't contradict you. To my sorrow I found the case otherwise with another of your old admirers I met yesterday by chance." Rose looked up quickly, thrown off her guard.

"Mick, do you mean?" she asked hastily. "Where? Never once has he sent news of himself since he left here, when his uncle died—that's three years come Christmas."

"How many broken hearts did he leave behind him?" I inquired tauntingly.

Rose bent over her work, drew a hard breath, then answered proudly and low:

"Not mine, for one."

"No, I'll engage yours is whole, if you have one," I

thought, exasperated by her imperturbable self-content. "It wasn't Mick I saw," said I; "it was a better man, for all that he's been wearing a convict's uniform, and, if he showed his face here, would be shunned like a leper."

This time I had hit home. Rose dropped her sewing and changed colour. Her lips would not speak his name aloud—she asked with subdued eagerness:

"Is he free?"

"Free, and off to America," I replied. "Where may heaven befriend him in his need!"

Her brown eyes, like a deer's, watched mine intently.

"How did he look?" she asked.

"Very sadly," I told her. "And once an outlaw means always an outlaw too often for men of his mould; but at least where he's gone he'll not have every man's hand against him, and every woman's tongue."

"I wish I had seen him," she said, as if thinking aloud.

"You? That would be too cruel. Why remind him how he came by his fall?"

Rose fired up, resentfully.

"Why do you talk to me so," she exclaimed, "as if I were the one to blame?"

"I think you were to blame," I said bluntly. "You let Jem come courting as if you liked it, and if he grew jealous of Mick do you mean that he dreamt the reason why?"

"I forgot his wild temper," said Rose wistfully; "I scarcely believed in it—he was always gentle when I was there. And I was bound by no promise—I was free to listen to Mick, if I chose."

"So you did choose."

"I might," Rose owned honestly. "He was one of those who make you believe anything; passed his word lightly—only to break it again. It had brought ruin and death to more than one here, and though Mick meant honest by me I let him know I had done with him. It was then he spoke those words which——"

"Which so nearly cost him his life," I supplied, repeating

again, "Jem wasn't sober, of course. He never was that way given; but when a temperance man does break out he knows no bounds."

"I never spoke to Mick again," Rose said, as if in self-acquittal.

"All very fine, my maid," thought I; "that will mend nothing now." And I could not help adding aloud, "Small comfort, I fear, to Jemmy King in prison, or battling on among strangers over the sea."

Rose, to my surprise, burst into tears. There, of course, was an end of me and my sermon. "Don't cry," said I, like the helpless man that I was.

"I don't see it was my fault," she said, "though but for me Jem never would have got into this trouble. It's the thought of him now that I can't bear. There's nothing I wouldn't do to help him or make amends—if I could—*nothing*."

"What! would you marry him, Rose?" I asked with indiscreet curiosity.

"I would," she said, taking her hands from her face, and speaking steadily and convincingly. "But you know that's impossible. Father would rather see me dead than Jem's wife now."

"Yes, I know." And if confirmation were wanting, it came upon us just then in the figure of the stout blacksmith—true type of the rigid, good-hearted, narrow-minded, inflexible cottage Philistine—as it were a "rural dean," in his gaiters and smith's apron. He had been a popular preacher in his youth, but dissent was not active in Eversfold, and Evans went to church with the rest.

We sat awhile chatting in the porch—watching a village congregation of some half-a-dozen coming out from afternoon service—I beg our new curate's pardon—from evensong.

"That's never Joe Murphy?" I asked presently, as a shock-haired, strange-faced figure, clad in apparently a cast-off suit of the curate's, came ambling out of the porch. "Taken to church-going! That beats everything!"

"He's taken a serious turn, and blows the organ," Evans stated gravely.

In my time he lived under a cloud, as addicted to poaching, presumably, and certainly to gin. Thanks to peculiarities of intellect, induced, probably, by the latter habit, he was treated as more than half irresponsible—an amiable village jester, whose follies are matters of course.

"He's taken the pledge," said Rose, "and kept it nigh on two years. He turned colporteur, and they nicknamed him 'Holy Joe,' but his health broke down, and organ-blowing is about all he's fit for."

I hailed the interesting convert as he passed. "Well, Murphy, good evening. Where do you come from?"

He touched his cap with pleased recognition, and made reply:

"Faith and it's church I'm always coming from. Mortal long psalm, 15th evening of the month. May you never have to earn a living off making a bellows of yourself, master."

"Glad to hear you're a reformed character," I rejoined with doubtful mind. I thought I discerned possibilities of relapse about "Holy Joe."

"Never touch a drop of spirits now," he declared. "I've forgotten what the taste is like." With a heavy sigh he wished me good evening and passed on, singing what might or might not be a psalm.

"Has *he* no news of Mick?" I asked suddenly. "They used to be as thick as thieves—those two."

"None," Rose answered. "Perhaps Eversfold is too humble for Mick now."

People used to ascribe Mick's "wildness" to Joe's corrupting influence, but birds of a feather flock together, and with strong-willed Mick, Murphy could never have been more than a shadow.

That evening, opening a blotting-book, I came upon my note of excuse to Parker, posted between those pages by mistake. It was too late now for it to reach him in time.

I consulted my mother, who was punctiliousness itself, and decided I must go Monday, as agreed. I should be with her again on Wednesday. On such haphazards hang men's destinies sometimes.

III.

THE SECRET OF SWALECLIFFE CASTLE.

"How far to Swalecliffe?"

I had reached Wood End after dusk on a wild, wet evening. The station had more than the usual God-and-man-forgotten look of those wind-swept, rain-rinsed halting places. I spoke to two human shapes, dimly discernible leaning against the palisades—as I hoped, a supine porter and flyman.

"Matter o' mile, mile and a half or two mile," was the gruff, vague reply, denoting the speaker as an independent Sykes or Hodge, with nothing to hope from me.

"I'm for Swalecliffe. Shall I find a trap to take me up?"

A suppressed guffaw of laughter from Hodge. He nudged Sykes.

"Bill, here's a bloke for Swalecliffe. Wants to be took up."

"Swalecliffe Castle," I added; "do you know it?" my question provoking fresh unseemly chuckling.

The missing porter here came to my aid, and after ten minutes, spent by the loafing navvies in cutting in their vernacular incomprehensible but seemingly surprisingly witty jokes at my expense, an open fly was fetched from the inn.

The heavy roads made the short drive almost long. The rain had ceased, and the subsiding wind blew in fitful gusts. Heavy masses of black cloud, like basaltic columns, were drifting away to the horizon. Overhead the sky was swept clear, and the moon shone out with after-rain brilliancy. The vegetation of the country I was passing through seemed

strikingly rich. Huge elms, sycamores and beeches overshadowed the road, their trunks wreathed with enormous ivy-growths. Geography was never my strong point, but I fancied there was a river in these parts. Suddenly we left the high road through the gates of a brand-new rustic lodge, and wound uphill through the private grounds of Swalecliffe, a dark drive of half a mile or more. On either side lay a picturesque jungle, shadowed by an overgrowth of enormous forest trees, and stretching on the left hand down a deep ravine, where the extraordinary luxuriance of the vegetation recalled a Carolina swamp. Huge masses of creepers loading the trunks and branches of the trees, made them look like misshapen giants. Below, a dense growth of large ferns, dark laurels and gnarled willows covered a marsh, revealed here and there by a pool of black water caught by the moonlight. The approach, as seen by me that night, was like some fantastic dream—a disordered fancy picture of Doré's—where the contorted boughs take half-human forms, and over all hangs some glamour of black magic. It was oppressive, and I felt a sense of relief as we abruptly emerged from the wood.

High and dry on a grassy eminence the Castle rose boldly before me, striking itself, from its size, its massive strength and picturesque style. The grey stone looked white against the dusky blue sky. It stood with its pleasure ground and outlying buildings, enclosed by a brick wall, like a veritable old fortress, with machicolated towers, and approach under the gateway of a Gothic stone-fronted lodge—the monster plaything of a merchant prince.

Matthew Parker met me at the front hall.

"Just in time for dinner," he announced. "You've twenty minutes to dress. David, show Mr. Milford his room."

An elderly, fatherly-looking footman led me into a large, lofty hall with a skylight roof. Corridors opened on each landing of the stone staircase we ascended. No wonder Parker was hospitable, with accommodation in his castle for the whole country.

I followed David down a long passage above, at the extreme end of which was my room. As he opened the door, a gust of air from the window left open extinguished his candle. Instead of first closing the window, he hastened back to the landing to get a light. Meaning to supply his omission, I walked into the room—the draught instantly slamming the door behind me.

It was a small oblong apartment, with a window facing the door. The breeze had parted the curtains, and the moon's rays streamed in between them. As I passed the threshold, I was arrested by an impression—unlike anything in my past or subsequent experience—an impression I can never forget, and would gladly never recall—fantastic, instantaneous, startlingly vivid. It was as if some strange, strangely-clad figure were hanging, lurking, in the aperture between the window curtains. I stopped, transfixed. I *know* the spell lasted not a minute, but it seemed an eternity that I stood there alone in the gloom, under a strange roof, shut in with this mystery—the semblance of a figure, and a face that I could not see.

David re-entered with a lamp. As he placed it on the table the moonbeams paled, the appearance resolved itself into an effect of light and shade; and now the man stood in the window embrasure filling the very space occupied a moment ago by another.

As he closed the window and drew the hangings I recovered myself, thinking, "We see faces in the fires, goblin shapes in the branchings of the trees, why not shadow figures in the curtains?"

With David's help I contrived to get down in time. Parker's entertainment was princely, like his mansion. Young people were in the majority, the evening passed merrily in round games and impromptu charades, and at midnight I retired, having laughed away the very recollection of that extraordinary delusion that had signalled my first moments in Swalecliffe.

I found my friend David stirring the fire. The room was

more than warm enough, but he showed an anxious solicitude for my well-being.

"I hope you'll sleep comfortable, sir. Can I do nothing more for you?"

"You might draw back the curtains," I suggested, as he seemed desirous to be employed, "it's a warm night, and I've a liking for fresh air."

"I think you'll sleep sounder, sir, with them closed," he returned with emphasis.

"I don't mind the moon. You can leave the blind drawn."

"I should recommend you, sir, to adhere to the present arrangement."

"Is anything wrong with the room?" I asked, struck by his odd manner; "for a single man, David, the accommodation is excellent."

"They do say, sir, as something is amiss with this apartment."

"Damp?" I suggested, looking at him.

"Dry as an evangelical sermon," he returned with solemn humour.

"Rats about, eh?"

"Oh, no, sir." He paused, then added, "And you don't believe in spirits, sir, of course. Neither do I. Still there's tales and things one can't explain, and if you'll take my advice, sir, you'll just let them curtains be. Good-night to you, sir."

It was with difficulty that I kept myself from betraying the unpleasant shock sent through me by David's parting speech. I had often desired to sleep in a haunted room, but my devout wish at this moment was that Parker had put me anywhere else. Second thoughts assured me it was a mere coincidence. Hundreds of similar cases of ocular delusion are on record. I thought I could privately account for my vision in a way that precluded connection with David's untold tale. And a castle like Swalecliffe would be incomplete without its ghost. I laughed, defied David and the

spirit-world, drew back the curtains, went to bed, and slept soundly all night through.

After breakfast on the morrow the guests were left awhile to follow their own devices. I strolled out on the lawn with a couple of county gentlemen to enjoy a morning cigarette. We sauntered some way along the hill, to a mound which afforded an excellent view of the Castle, which we stayed to contemplate.

"Cleverly done, upon my honour," ejaculated Sir John approvingly. "It looks uncommonly well."

"Your never thought to find yourself inside Swalecliffe," rejoined the other, laughing.

Something in the manner of their jocularity unaccountably reminded me of those rough loiterers at the station.

"Swalecliffe Castle," the speaker added. "Sounds fine. Well, we shall soon get used to it."

"Get used to what?" I asked inquisitively.

"Why, don't you know?" said Sir John, taking his cigar from his lips.

"Is there anything to know? I am a stranger in these parts."

"Oh, I see." He replaced his cigar. "Well, till last year Swalecliffe was a prison."

This time I started outright.

"Why, what's the matter?" he said laughing, "you don't seem to like the notion."

"I don't," said I, trying, but unsuccessfully, to laugh also. Here was a *second* coincidence, in itself preternaturally strange.

"Well, it was for sale cheap. Capital site, buildings and building material to treat as he liked. The river's taken to overflowing, and for that and other reasons the convict establishment has been removed to Southbury, ten miles off. Parker's bought up the land about, and will drain the marsh, so it's been a good thing for everybody all round. But you can't get over it, I see."

"A prison!" I repeated. "There's something lugubrious in the idea."

"Well," quoth Sir John, philosophically, "you can't be particular about the antecedents of a house, as if it were a person. Perhaps Swalecliffe might stand inquiry better than some old family places. It was a model establishment in every way."

I had recovered my self-possession. "Let us hope, then, it is unaffected by sinister associations."

"There *is* a haunted chamber somewhere, I believe," said my companion, laughing; "but who the enterprising burglar is who comes a burgling is more than I know."

The subject was dropped. But although persuaded not one ghost-story in a thousand is worth investigating, I said to myself this was the one. I must question Parker. Not to-day, not till after the ball. I own I was not sorry that dancing was prolonged till broad daylight. Then only I retired to my room, for which I had conceived the strongest aversion. I rose in good time, as I was leaving after breakfast. Parker did not appear. A slight attack of gout confined him to his room, where I went to bid him adieu, and found him cordial, jocund as usual.

"Always glad to see you at Swalecliffe, remember. We've made a presentable place of it, have we not?"

"If it were possible," I returned with emphasis, "to exorcise gloomy associations you must have succeeded."

"If? Come, say we've done it," he urged cheerfully.

"Do you never find nervous people painfully affected by anything here? I have a reason for asking."

"What do you mean?" said he sharply.

"No depressing influences or uncomfortable stories to trouble you or your guests?"

Annoyed, he muttered, "It's those confounded servants. Has that old fool David——"

"He hinted something," I said, "I should scarcely have borne in mind but that *four hours before*, when first stepping into that room, I had a curious false impression—hallucination if you like—that, coupled with his remark, warrants my question."

He shifted his position in manifest impatience, saying, "Now, Mr. Milford, you're a sensible man; tell me what you saw, what you thought you saw."

"I'm a sensible man, I hope, but I fancy, were I to tell you, I should forfeit your good opinion."

He showed no curiosity, only increased vexation at my disclosure. "If this goes on I must pull down the wing—if only to stop people's mouths."

"If what goes on?"

"I slept there myself every night for a week, and saw nothing."

"Has anybody but myself ever seen anything?"

"The servants see something fresh every night. What? Black dogs, white ladies, men in armour, a skeleton rattling chains—nonsense on the face of it."

"Does any story attach to that—cell, I suppose it was?"

"My dear sir, you don't suppose I ever asked. If stories go about I carefully avoid hearing them. But I will tell you the single circumstance I can vouch for in connection with the matter."

"Not long ago we had a lady staying here. She came to give painting lessons to my daughters—a clever artist, but of a nervous, fanciful, hysterical temperament. Knowing this I wished the origin of our castle to be kept from her, but somehow the secret must have oozed out. The builders were still at work, and we were obliged to give her that little room. One night she came rushing to my daughters in a frenzy of terror and excitement at something she said she had seen. They succeeded in calming her, but nothing would ever induce her to re-enter that apartment. Nor at first would she tell us what she had seen there. She was sensitive and saw we were inclined to ridicule her panic. She said afterwards she would *paint* it for us, and she kept her word."

"Have you kept the picture?" I asked eagerly.

"It so happens I have. I meant to destroy it, but put it aside, and forgot."

I petitioned earnestly to be allowed to see it. He yielded at last with evident reluctance. Opening a cupboard in the wall, he took out a large canvas.

"It's a clever bit of sensational painting—theatrical—but makes an effective ghost picture," he remarked, as he placed it in view.

Its effect on me was so strong that my utmost self-command scarcely kept me from betraying an emotion that would have stamped me for ever as a madman or visionary in the mind of my host. How it called back the impression of that night, down to the minutest particulars! The objects in the room seen unequally, some mere dim shadows, others distinct in the moonlight, the open casement with the parted curtains in front, and between them that sinister-looking figure in the semi-grotesque dress with the hidden face.

"You see," said Parker by-and-by, "how easily any one whose brain had been dwelling on the antecedents of Swalecliffe might conjure up such a vision."

I, however, had been ignorant of the castle's antecedents.

"Well," he concluded, "I shall destroy it now. I take no interest in these delusions."

"Will you give it me?" I asked. "I do take some interest in these delusions. I promise you to spread no foolish stories nor exhibit the picture at home."

"As you please," he said indifferently. "But how in the world will you carry away a painting of that size?"

"Easily," I said. Taking my knife I detached the canvas from the wood, and made a roll of it which I could carry in my hand.

The circumstance was too startling, too incredibly strange. I wanted time to recover from the first surprise, which was such that my reason doubted the evidence of my senses.

IV.

"HOLY JOE."

I MISSED the down train in London, dined at the station, not reaching Cross Hills until past nine, instead of at six. Leaving my valise to follow by the carrier next morning, I walked up across country. The footpath I had taken brought me into the lane skirted by the palings of our grounds opposite a gate in them of which I had the key in my pocket. The gate led me into a copse, where at no great distance stood a rustic summer-house I had appropriated as a comfortable smoking lounge—strongly built, heather thatched, lined with matting, and furnished with a rustic table, couch, and chairs. Already, since my return, I had brought thither a few books, writing materials and newspapers, that gave it a habitable appearance. I went inside for the purpose of there depositing the ghost picture in security and secrecy, for the place was locked and never visited but by myself. Had I taken the canvas home the servants or my mother would assuredly have ferreted it out, and I had promised discretion to old Parker. I lit a lantern and unrolled the picture, which had become somewhat creased. To stretch it out, I thrust tin tacks through the four corners and fastened it thus to the matting on the wall.

Great goodness! What a horrid, haunting thing it was! I felt constrained to gaze on, though hating the contemplation. How minutely it answered to my hallucination! Or was it only my excited fancy that said so? Presently I began to enter into old Parker's desire to get rid of it. I should have destroyed it then and there had this been an easy task. Then I decided to keep it, at least till the mystery had been cleared up. That very night I would write to the Governor of Southbury and make searching inquiry.

But I could not have it staring me in the face. I took an

old sheet of the *Times* and pinned it across; then, taking the lantern, turned to walk home through the wood.

At that moment I heard a thud, as of a man's weight alighting from over the palings on the grass. I turned off the lantern and endeavoured to reconnoitre through a cranny in the summer-house. What should a lurcher be doing at this hour? Easy to guess. The game shop at the next town was notoriously supplied by others than those who had the right to shoot. The moon was veiled, but there was light enough to me to descry the man's figure stealing nearer through the copse. I was no very rigid enforcer of the game-laws, but was none the less eager to take stock of my poacher. It might be for a wife and six starving children that he was earning a dishonest penny; but I should like to know it. As he crept through the underwood I caught a glimpse that sufficed for recognition. By all that's hypocritical, the reformed drunkard, the ex-colporteur, the model organ-blower, Holy Joe!

The rascal disappeared again in the thick of the copse, where, no doubt, his trap was set. It was no case of accomplices or firearms, and I was not afraid of tackling Joe Murphy. Whilst he was busy with the trap I slipped out, ensconsed myself so as to cut off his retreat towards the palings, and just as he turned to make off with his booty, I dashed at him and collared him.

"Let go, you d—d keeper," he roared, "or I'll swear I caught you doing a job on your own account. Like enough you trapped that bird. Get off," and with a frantic effort he actually shook off my hold. "Take that—and that," hitting out right and left, then, as I closed with him, fighting fiercely as a badger, and showing a savage strength that took me by surprise. I had to defend myself for a minute, then came a sharp tussle, then a well-planted blow of mine levelled him to the ground, where he lay groaning, his valour extinguished, whining out that I had done for him, and it was all over with "Holy Joe."

"Get up," I said, suspecting he was shamming. He

shook his head. He knew me now, and gazed at me reproachfully, saying I had broken every bone in his body, and all for a poor little bird he had gone for to kill, just to put it out of its misery. He never could bear to see poor dumb animals suffer! I fetched the lantern and flashed it on his face. It was white and strange. Seeing he either couldn't or wouldn't stir unaided, I got him inside the summer-house. A few moments would show whether he were really hurt—I might have hit harder than I intended—or whether, as I believed, he had got no more than the good drubbing he richly deserved for his delinquencies. I propped him up in a chair and lit some candles. He was pale and trembling, whether from fear, pain, or nervous shock, I could not tell.

"Master Milford," he announced by-and-by with solemnity, "I'm dying."

"Dying? Stuff and nonsense, man," I replied. "You're not damaged beyond a few bruises. I'm doctor enough to tell you that. Why did you turn on me in that wild-cat fashion? I never thought you'd show fight," I confessed.

"I was always a demon when roused," he said with ludicrous dignity. "There's more than one's felt the weight of this," setting down a flabby fist, "till the rheumatism caught me—all along of long hours in them damp churches."

But as he spoke the clue to all—to his flash of vigour and his swift collapse—betrayed itself, alas, in the corner of a brandy flask, half full, protruding from his pocket. I drew it forth and shook it in his face.

"Rheumatism, you malingering rogue! That's how you prime yourself for raids on my premises. You were half tipsy when I met you Saturday—you who've forgotten the taste of spirits, never touch a drop!"

"Medicinally," he said gravely, with a sly twinkle in his eye. "Under doctor's orders. You're a bit of a doctor you said. Now you've half killed me, master, least you can do is to order me the restorative."

"No," said I, convinced he had had more than enough

"If you're faint, there's water here." As I moved to the shelf to get the jug, Joe, the instant my back was turned, suddenly recovering the use of his limbs, rose, seized the flask I had incautiously laid on the table, and drained it as if it were water indeed. Then he sank back in the chair with an inarticulate expression of bliss.

"Rascal! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" I said, furious and helpless, "getting relief from the parish, and setting up for a temperance man, swilling brandy enough on the sly to kill a hippopotamus. Drunkard and thief besides!"

He looked at me with hopeless, imperturbable serenity. Neither gods nor men could touch him for just that one moment of ineffable content. The dose had galvanised his damaged wits into quick, confused activity. The string of his tongue was loosed. It never took much to do that.

"Come, there's thieves and thieves," he began. "Some rides on horseback, and some daren't look over a hedge. See that young devil, Mick——"

"Aye, the vagabond," I broke in—for the mere name of him put me in a rage now. "You and he are a pair to match."

"Eh, have you see him?" asked Joe, his curiosity roused by my warmth. "Where, master? Lolling in luxury, I'll swear, whilst honest, hard-working folks like Joe Murphy starve on crusts. I'd change that, if ever he came back," he added.

"So thick you and he were together," I said, struck by his vindictive tone. Joe, who was growing garrulous, rambled on.

"As comfortable to be thick with he as with a pair o' shears. Shuts on your fingers and cuts 'em off. Tell me where he is, master. If I knew, I'd take it out of him yet; he as lets his old pal slave and come on the parish, when a word o' mine could set the police on him for a thief and a robber."

"Serve him right, too," I rejoined. My feelings towards

Mick were such that there was something not displeasing to me in any addition to the list of his known misdemeanours, and I tried to draw Joe on—whose wits seemed getting hazier every moment—by following up his thought.

"I was a fool to let the beggar slide, and trust his word for the swag," he said; then muttered, indistinctly, to himself, "Sampson knew, Sampson knew!"

"Knew Mick was a robber," I struck in, too sharply. It roused Joe's caution.

"Nay," and he shook his head with a sickly smile. "I never said so."

"But so it was, I rejoined, warming to the part I was playing. "Else, why did the old man cut him off with a shilling? He couldn't do more."

This argument, spoken as if it were unanswerable, seemed to overwhelm Joe by its convincing logic.

"'Course, why cut him off? Do as you've been done by. Nevvy robbed the uncle, so why shouldn't the uncle rob the nevvy. Ha! ha! Sampson couldn't do more, or he would. No evidence; only *I'd* got that to give. Wish I had. Why should I be tenderer to Mick than his own kith and kin? Answer me that."

"You and he were a couple of infernal dogs," I exclaimed, forgetting myself.

The drift of Joe's confused utterances pointed, it seemed, to some successful attempt of the two to help themselves out of old Sampson's cash-box—an extremely probable occurrence. It revolted my sense of justice that these rogues should escape scot free, whilst poor Jem had to pay the full penalty of his fatal though just anger.

"If men had their deserts," I continued, "I know where you'd be now; and Mick along with you."

He shook his head, stammering with a tipsy smile:

"'But a dog at large is better than a caged lion,' Proverbs says."

"So you robbed Mick's uncle for him," I resumed quietly, "and you and he divided the spoil?"

But his mistrust was now thoroughly roused. Raising himself from his chair, he said with a manner that showed me I should get no more out of him.

"Don't you try and come over Joe Murphy. I see what you're at. But split me if this old bird's to be caught with chaff. I'm going home."

"Off with you, then," I retorted, resisting the temptation to precipitate his exit with a kick, "and mind, if I catch you after my partridges a second time, I'll have you up, as sure as my name's Milford. Why, mercy on us, man, what now?"

Joe seemed not to hear; a sudden pallor came into his face, his eyes, fixed and dilated, were staring into space, his frame shrank together, he cowered abjectly, terror-stricken, pointing before him with a shaking hand, and faltering out in a tone which for fright and dismay I never heard equalled,

"Good Lord, what's that?"

I thought he was delirious. Looking back, I perceived that the covering had slipped from the ghost-picture. The rays of light so fell on it as to throw out with ghastly weirdness that single, strange, strangely-clad figure with the woollen cap drawn over his face. It might have been an apparition from the other side of the grave. Upon Joe the first effect was appalling. His limbs, his tongue seemed paralysed. I was about to speak, when he staggered to his feet, shaking as if palsied, and dropped on his knees, faltering,

"It's King! it's Tiger King—dead in prison, as I've seen him, nights when I lay awake. Dead! and come back to carry me off to hell with him. Don't come to me!" and he struck out wildly into the air. "Get to Mick, you gaping ruffian. I'm hung if I ever lifted up my voice against you. Have mercy on our souls!" He covered his eyes, then looked again fearfully, half-crazed, and crying out in desperation, "Don't stand there dangling, as if . . . Lift your cap—let's see your face underneath." Then with a screech that made my blood run cold, and shrinking away, unable to

take his eyes off the figure, "It's a death's head, I know. Find Mick, I tell you; the perjured, cunning rascal! Man's not bound to criminate himself. That's British law, all the world over. I bore you no grudge, Jem, I swear. But what idiot would go lodge a charge against himself when he could keep out of jail by holding of his tongue—kind o' suicide—and that's felony." He shrank back against the wall, growing wilder and wilder in looks and utterance, as he gasped, "I never charged you—no more than babe unborn. Police did that. If Mick swore to you, that was his business. Yours was to clear yourself, if you could. Get off, or I'll dash your brains out, ghost or man. Come near me and I'll do for you, as I did for——" here he choked, staggered, and fell down helpless, in a fit.

For a moment I stood transfixed, dumbfounded, and in bewilderment at his half-disclosures, hints at some hideous mystery in the background. The fear lest he should die now, and with him all hopes of further elucidation, brought me to my senses. I ran to him, loosened his collar, and laid him flat on the couch. Then I hastily refastened the sheet of paper over the picture. His faint was slight, and in a few minutes he opened his eyes. Instantly they darted to the space on the wall, behind me.

"Gone," he muttered, then raised himself, looking round, and sighing, "Bad dreams makes cowards of the bravest men." He paused, then with a change of expression, turning his eyes on me, "Master," he began, in the same maudlin tone as at first, "I'm dying. You've done for me. It's all over with Holy Joe."

He was no more dying than I was. The morbid fancy was born of brandy. He might, however, have drunk himself to the verge of *delirium tremens*, and possible consequent imbecility.

"If so it be, then, Joe," I said deliberately, "I'd die honest, and leave nothing untold—of the mischief you and Mick were up to together."

"The villain!" cried Joe resentfully. "*He* brought me

to this. I was a harmless chap before. Liked a drop o' Sundays, but what o' that? The better the day the better the drink, ha! ha! 'Twas Mick set me on for his own ends, and then would have cheated me out of the cash—I who'd had all the pains and the risk."

"He made you rob Sampson's cash-box for him," said I, thrust by circumstances into playing the detective. I was only an amateur, and Joe's face of innocence and surprise, as he asked what I meant, showed he had wit enough left to baffle a cross-examination.

"Oh, that's an old story," I said, indifferently. "Sampson knew."

"No, no—suspected," Joe corrected me. "Police said it was burglars. And the box was never found."

"You hid it so well," I hazarded, taking my cue from the expression of his face, "they may look and welcome."

"Look till the Day of Judgment," said he, "Mick don't know himself. But he had the money, all but ten pound. We were to have shared alike."

"What a swindle," I chimed in, "to give you the job and cheat you of your due!"

"Why, I didn't so much as know where Sampson kept his cash. It was Mick told me of the safe in the wall, and how to get at the key. Simple as A B C. And Sampson never missed it for three days."

"Clever," I rejoined, "so far you scored." Joe pursued.

"Then that night—same night as Mick had that set-to with Jemmy King at the 'Cricketers,' we met, as agreed, by the old chestnut in Elmer's field. And there was only half the cash we'd looked for. 'Twas then Mick, the shark! wanted to get all into his hands. I knew I'd never see a penny if he did. He swore he'd lodge me in jail if I peached. Who'd believe the word of a poor devil like me against him? But I paid him out that night."

I was no actor. Excitement deprived me of all self-control, and vainly I tried to keep from betraying emotion

that would rouse Joe's dormant instincts of prudence, as I spoke.

"And you, Joe Murphy, committed the murderous assault for which Jem was found guilty?"

"Hullo, what's that story?" he said in a changed tone. But righteous anger forbade dissimulation. I trusted to confound and overwhelm him with the discovery.

"Clear as daylight. You fought Mick, who dared not charge you with the assault lest you should confess all, and implicate him in the robbery."

But Joe's cunning had not quite deserted him.

"You're a smart gentleman," he said, "but Joe's smarter if he's taken you in with his tales."

I saw myself baffled, my hopes discomfited. Every one knows what the self-accusations of a drunkard are worth. I had only words, not a scrap of evidence to rely on. Possibly his tale *was* the offspring of disordered imagination.

"Well, it's all past and gone," I resumed presently. "And Sampson's dead, so there's nothing to fear from that quarter. Now there's only one thing more: what became of the cash box?"

But Joe, once fully conscious I was trying to draw him out, was not to be imposed on.

"Cash box?" he echoed, surprised. "Why, you don't mean to say you've been listening to a poor, crazed fellow's yarns. I've forgot 'em already."

Provoked to exasperation, I tried a menace, saying severely:

"If you don't answer me now, I'll have you before the magistrates to-morrow, and locked up for a poacher and incorrigible vagabond."

The threat was an utter failure.

"They're Christian gentlemen," he returned, "and won't sit hard on a poor broken-down chap like me. I'll chance it, master."

In despair I was about to let him him go, when I was struck with a sudden idea. With a rapid movement of one

hand I detached the covering from the picture. Joe, who had not seen the act, was suddenly again confronted with what he took evidently for an apparition. The effect was instantaneous. With scared looks he clutched me, crying wildly:

"Oh, master, see—he's there again."

"Where—what?" said I, looking about. "What do you mean, what do you see?"

"Yonder, Jemmy King, in his prison dress—see the broad arrow everywhere—he wants to throttle me. Pull him off. He's coming after me," and he dashed for the door. I had locked it.

"Murphy, you conscience-stricken coward," I cried, "this comes of your false ways and lying tongue. It's your guilty fancy brings these terrors upon you. Tell the truth and they'll let you go. You and Mick robbed old Sampson Glover and fought about the money. And the cash box—you shall stand here until you tell me."

"Hidden," he gasped out, vanquished at last, "in Elmer's field, by the old chestnut, three yards to the north, deep underground. There, now, for the love of mercy—help—get me away."

I flung open the door. Covering his face with his hands, he rushed out. But his head was unsteady, he staggered a few yards, then sank down on the grass, clearly unable to get further.

I went to the gate in the fence and blew a long loud whistle, which in process of time brought assistance from the nearest cottages, and some of our own labourers.

"Take this man to the parish infirmary," I said, "I caught him trespassing, but let that pass; the doctor had better look to him, for he needs it."

"Let him deny everything to-morrow," I thought. "I shall know now what his tale is worth."

CONCLUSION.

It was a chill October eve, four weeks later. My mother thought me demented, for the restlessness that kept driving me out of doors, since within I could not keep quiet. Enough had happened during those weeks to unsettle a rock. First the strange confession that had fallen from Joe's lips, and the results of the investigation, so far private, that had been instituted, establishing King's complete innocence of the charge successfully fastened on him. A stranger thing than this had been brought to light, and of its strangest feature I alone had knowledge.

I was now disturbed by increasing fears that these revelations had come too late. I had cabled to meet the "Cambria," but the answer, by letter or in person, I had hoped for eight days ago came not. My telegram might have missed one who probably travelled under some other name—it might have arrived too late, or Jem might have changed his destination, taken another ship, drifted out of reach; and worse and gloomier possibilities suggested themselves at times to my fancy.

A hundred times I had gone down to the station on faint pretexts, till I vowed I would go no more. My walk this evening took me along the lane we called Shooter's Hill. I was planning advertisements to send to the American papers. The autumn mists rising on all sides made the cattle look colossal, the trees giants, the moon an auroral sun, human forms monsters. I see one coming down the lane, and, do what I will, my pulse quickens. This last week I have seen a hundred Jemmy Kings afar off, and it has always turned out to be a carter, or a pedlar, or the dairyman. To-night, I am clear the person in the distance is *not* Jem—and yet there is a train at about this hour, and his preternatural height may be an effect of the fog. Hurry forward to meet him and be disappointed, I will not. I

wait, and as he comes nearer I recognise with a thrill, first his old footstep, then—my heart bounding with satisfaction—I confront—his old self—but not as when we parted last on this very ground, but hale, and bronzed with sea travel, invigorated with revived hope and spirits, surer restoratives than the breezes of the Atlantic.

Being English we shake hands without speaking a word At last I observe significantly:

"This time you'll not refuse to walk up with me, Jem."

Suddenly withdrawing his hand, with a doubt and suspicion that died very hard, he demanded, almost roughly:

"It's all true, is it, what your message told me? If you did it only to coax me back, though meaning kindly—it's the worst, cruellest wrong you ever did in your life. Before I go a step farther tell me straight how it stands."

"Jemmy," said I, "you're cleared. Joe Murphy, the real culprit, has confessed."

"*Murphy*," he uttered, amazed—"Mick's own pal!"

"Say accomplice in theft—Joe, who had drunk himself to the very verge of hopeless imbecility, and was convinced he was dying. But for that he would never have come out with it. They robbed Sampson Glover, and fought over the money that night. Mick dared not get Murphy into trouble by naming him as his assailant. Strong suspicion had fallen on you—only confirmation was wanting. Mick gave it—paid off his grudge."

"And a curse on his villany that sent me to rot in prison!" Jem struck in excitedly.

"Hush, said I, "Mick is out of reach of man's curse now."

"Dead?" Jem uttered, his animosity unappeased. "Dead—unpunished?"

"He left Eversfold, and lived in London under an assumed name. He became a partner in a band of sharpers, and two years later was, with them, convicted of forgery, and obtained a heavy sentence—but still under his assumed name, his real one remaining undiscovered. Nor should we ever have

known his fate but for a strange circumstance. A photograph that happened to be sent me together with an answer to certain inquiries I had occasion to make of the governors of the Southbury convict establishment, identified him with the prisoner in question. He hanged himself in his cell at Swalecliffe eighteen months ago."

The effect of this intelligence on Jem was unanticipated by me. It not only sobered his passion, but the shock brought about a slow revulsion of feeling; and when he spoke again it was with an altered manner, as if awed into a kind of contrition.

"Master Frank," he said, "there's something comes on me now—something I put out of sight in my trouble. Perhaps you won't shake hands so heartily when I've told you—but I'm not so white now as you'd paint me."

He was silent as if reluctant to utter his thought, then spoke with a sombre sort of intensity that was impressive—if not agreeably so—and convincing.

"*I might* have murdered him that night, for his talk. I can hear him now, laughing and saying he knew she would follow his whistle, like others we knew—coupling Rose's name along with theirs! It wasn't the drink, as they said, it was the devil took hold of me then; I could have killed him there, but they held me back. I swore an oath. 'Perdition take my soul, but you sha'n't get home alive.' I meant it. They turned me out, but I stood waiting for him two hours at the cross-roads where he used to pass. I meant to force him to a fight; but there could be no fair fight between a slip lad like him and me. He never came. Had I gone home straight from the 'Cricketers,' I could have cleared myself, easy. But one had seen me hanging about there in the dark, another come in late, in a madman's temper. I myself could give no clear account of the time between; and my own words and acts rose up in witness against me. I felt dazed, stupid-like—and waked slowly from that devil's dream to find myself in a convict gang."

"My poor fellow," said I, "you have more than expiated your rash oath, which I take leave to doubt you would have followed up with a crime."

As we walked on Jem grew calm again, and he told me how his voyage had been prolonged by an accident to the ship. I told him how I had arranged that he was to come home with me, and stay there quietly till the inquiry was concluded, when the facts would be made public.

"Do they know in the village?" he asked.

"One knows," said I, "I told her, Jem; she is waiting and watching for you."

Jem's attempts to preserve a manly indifference were most unsuccessful.

"Not married yet?" he asked constrainedly. "But what's that to me? She never cared."

"She cared enough," I returned, "to have married you when you came out of prison a month ago—had it depended on her."

"*Rose Evans?*"

"Rose Evans—she told me so then. For my part, Jem, I should ask no more than that of any girl."

Jem held his tongue; we were approaching the pleasure ground at home; our way led us past a green that lay near the back entrance, planted with sycamores and elms. I resumed:

"She has been at the house to-day, to do some needlework for my mother. Suppose, Jem, that should be her now, leaving the gate?"

He had descried her already. She had seen us and stopped, uncertain what to do. Even at this distance I seemed to feel the charm of those soft full outlines, the pure bloom on her rounded cheek. Jem too had stopped dead—my destiny clearly was to join the hands of these shy village lovers.

"Won't I startle her too much?" faltered Jem tremulously and low like a girl.

"It will be no surprise," said I. "These three weeks

she has looked for it every day. It was I who despaired—she never did."

* * * * *

Under the elms I left them. Call no man unlucky until he is dead.

A few days more and Jem will be the talk of the village—again a little while, and Rose will be a bride. Jem has suffered certainly, but I foresee for him rarer compensation than the Home Secretary can bestow.

And the secret of Swalecliffe Castle? I have told the thing as it happened, let who will try to draw conclusions. One more added to the list of evidences of things unseen; tales over which fools laugh and wise men ponder.

THE SECRET OF THE MINE;

OR,

UP AND DOWN MOEL VAMMER.

PART I.—THE WAY UP.

I.

"ALFRED must go into business!" said my father, getting up and knocking the ashes out of his pipe in a determined way.

"Well, governor," said my brother Tom, after a few earnest whiffs from his little black cutty, "I must say I think you're very foolish. None of our family have ever condescended to trade, and, with our connections, I think something ought to be done for Alfred—the Civil Service, now? I suppose you couldn't afford to put him in the Army?"

"Army, indeed! No, no, Tom; I can't afford another eldest son. Your education, my boy, cost me a pretty penny; and though I'm very glad to see you holding such a position—a Master of Arts, and a clergyman, and very well spoken of in the county—yet, after all, the pay—the pay ain't much. A hundred a year, isn't it, you're getting now, Tom?"

The family council which was to decide my fate was not held in any baronial hall; it was at No. 44, Peagreen Street, Alchester in the Flats, in a little back-parlour overlooking the water-butt. My father, Captain Orlando Tubbs, R.N.—be particular about the R.N., please, as you'll bear in mind that a captain in the navy ranks as colonel in the army;

and although my father was really only commander, yet he was captain by courtesy, and entitled to all the privileges of his rank—my father, bless his dear old soul! I think I can see him now as he stands in the little back-parlour, with his back to the fire and his hands clasped behind him, his quaint puckered face gathered into lines of thought, his mild honest eyes, which had so long looked out hopefully and cheerfully on the world, turned upon me, his younger son, with a world of quiet affection in the look—my father put his hand on my shoulder: "Ted, you'll have to go into business and make a fortune!"

Ah, boys, it's a fine thing to have a father to start us in our course.

When my father did put down his foot, which wasn't often, it was pretty well understood amongst us that he would have his way; and although I affected to feel rather indignant that I should have to descend into trade and forfeit my social position, yet as that social position didn't bring with it any commensurate enjoyable advantages, I didn't really grieve at the prospect.

But I certainly did expect that, having made up my mind to the sacrifice, having resigned myself a victim to the altar of Mammon, the sacrifice would be accepted, the victim duly slaughtered.

My father had some rather vague and hazy ideas on the subject of business. Generally, he fancied that the correct thing to be done was to get me into a counting-house, and that, after a certain number of years' probation, I should become a merchant. "And you'll go on 'Change, and all that, you know, Alfred." But when he inquired of one or two practical friends (he was rather fond, was my father—he'd been at sea, you know, and picked up some unrefined habits—he was rather fond of looking in at the bar of the White Hart of an evening, and having a glass of grog, a smoke, and a chat with the bagmen who congregated there: "There's some very sensible, clever fellows amongst them, and they know a great deal of the world," he would say);

when he inquired of some of these practical friends of his, he was rather bewildered by the almost infinite ramifications of "trade," and the enormous difficulty in obtaining the slightest opening in the world for a well-nurtured youth.

"Do you know," said my father, glancing somewhat shyly at me and timidly towards my mother, "that some of those gentlemen I met at the White Hart last night——"

"Gentlemen, indeed!" quoth my mother; "ugh!"

"They're quite gentlemen, indeed, my dear, and most expensively dressed," said my father, glancing down at his own somewhat seedy habit: as sailors do, he delighted in the most hideous costume possible—Wellington boots with square toes three inches too long, black trousers not reaching to his ankles, a black satin waistcoat, dress-coat, and great wisp of black silk round his neck supporting a shirt collar of the perpendicular order—one pinnacle of which would be tickling his ear, whilst the other would be swallowed up by the great black silk serpent which was choking him.

"And I'm sure, my dear, they must be making a great deal of money, for their jewellery is most splendid. Well, as I was saying, my dear, one of those gentlemen told me that the best thing I could do for a boy would be—it would give him such a knowledge of *goods*, he told me—would be—hem!—to put him into a draper's shop."

My mother dropped her work, her needle in the air.

"Orlando," she said, after a solemn pause, "if you think of sending Alfred into a shop, I beg you will give me early notice of your intention. I shall certainly retire amongst my own friends, and eke out the remainder of my days on the small competence which, thank God, is still left to me, notwithstanding your extravagance."

Wasn't that noble of the old girl? it settled the question firmly. We heard no more of the draper's shop.

In his perplexity my father bethought him of an ancient cousin, a trader in the city of London; and to him he wrote a long letter setting forth my qualifications and antecedents: how that I had been educated at Alchester Grammar School,

had attained to a respectable knowledge of Greek and Latin, knew a little about Euclid, and something more about Colenso, from an arithmetical—not a theological—point of view, that is. My father's letter was backed up by a ponderous testimonial from Dr. Aldus, the head-master; and for about a week after its despatch both my dad and myself had a secret notion that it would result in an offer from my cousin of a seat in his "counting-house" at a salary of a few hundreds, with a partnership in immediate prospective.

The reply ran thus:—

"16, Munchurch Lane, E.C.

"DEAR ORLANDO,

"There is no demand for the article you mention. If I were you I would send the lad to St. Bees, and make a parson of him. But if you should decide on trying to get a situation for him in the City, he may call at my office, and I will give him such advice as I can.

"Yours obediently,

"BENJ. BARREL."

Our first impression on perusing this letter was unfavourable; but on going over it again, we found that it was susceptible of a more hopeful rendering. Clearly, we couldn't expect a man of Barrel's position to open his arms and say, "Come and share my business and wealth." But he was evidently anxious to see me, and no time ought to be lost in giving him an opportunity.

Next day's noon saw me at No. 16, Munchurch Lane, a quiet little eddy in the City tide, knocking at the door of my cousin's office. He was in, and received me coldly enough.

"Oh, you're Tubbs' boy, are you?" he said, after reading my father's letter of introduction. "And you want a situation, eh? What sort of a berth are you looking after?"

I told him I wasn't particular. I should rather like to be the secretary of a public company, but in the meantime I wouldn't object to a seat in his, my cousin's office, if we could come to terms.

"What good would you be to me?" growled Barrel.

"Keep your books and assist you in your business."

"Books! There's my books, young man," pointing with his pen to a battered parchment-covered volume on the table. "Assistance! There's all the assistance I want," indicating a pale sharp-featured boy who sat in the outer office. "Three shillings a week, office hours eight to eight: holidays, Christmas Day and Good Friday. Suit you, eh?"

"I think I'll wait till the secretaryship's vacant," I said, with as much nonchalance as I could assume.

The bursting of one's first bubble, the collapse of one's first illusion, is a painful affair; but as I wasn't going to get anything out of my cousin, why should I be so civil to him? To stand with bated breath and bowed shoulders before the dispensers of the privileges of the world is, to the great majority of us, the condition on which we hold such small portion of the great inheritance as may be ours; but to bow before an idol that gives us no meat from the sacrifice, to cringe for nothing, to grovel for the mere love of self-abasement!

I stuck my hands into my pockets, tilted back my chair, made a critical survey of the office, ending with my cousin, who was fidgetting in his seat, evidently wanting me to go.

"How do you find this City life agree with you, Barrel?—tendency to produce embonpoint, eh? Feel swimming in the head sometimes? Hope you don't go in for port wine? My poor old Fred Carter—you knew Carter, I dare say; same age as you, I should think, and just your make—well, he died of '47 port: took it a year too soon. I told him it would do for him."

My worthy relative seemed a good deal staggered. I must have appeared to him a skeleton at the banquet, for Carter was a school-fellow of his. Barrel loved his bottle of port, and was going to dine that day at Clockmakers' Hall, where the '47 port was a feature.

"Really, Mr. Tubbs, you'll excuse me, but——"

"Don't mention it. Finish what you're about, and don't

mind me. When you've done we'll go for a stroll, and you shall show me the Royal Exchange, and the Corn Market, and Billingsgate—just the lions of the City, you know."

At that moment there caught my eye, on my cousin's writing-table, a lump of quartz.

"What have you got here, Barrel—paving stones? Is that in your line of business—dust contractor and road repairer—eh?"

My cousin heaved a great sigh of relief, put down his pen, and looked me in the face, quite aglow.

"The very thing for you, Tubbs. Dear me, I shall be very glad to serve Orlando's boy."

He wrote a short note and gave it me.

"There, take this to Stock and Barrel, Gresham House, and I don't think I shall be in town for the next week or so, or I should be delighted to see you; got an important appointment now. Good-bye, remember me to your father."

I found young Barrel a good specimen of a City stock-broker—a little florid and fast, but frank and free, with no nonsense about him. He read my uncle's note.

"Glad to see you, old fellow. We're relations, it seems. Come and dine with us to-night—Onslow Square, seven o'clock. Meantime, about this pursership."

"I beg your pardon?"

"*Pursership!*

"Ain't that something in a steamboat?"

"There are pursers and pursers; this is in a mine, a gold mine."

"But I don't wan't to go abroad."

"It's in North Wales. Read old Barrel's letter."

"DEAR NEPHEW,

"Dumbrell was asking me to recommend a purser for the Dolgarreg Mine. If not disposed of, get it for my cousin, Tubbs, the bearer. The qualification is fifty 5*l.* shares, 2*l.* paid, for the purchase of which I will be answerable."

"Gad! he's not a bad sort. Is it vacant still, and how much shall I get?"

"Go on to Dumbrell, Mincing Lane, at once," said Barrel, dashing a couple of scrawls across my cousin's letter.

Dumbrell I found, after a good deal of difficulty.

"You're a lucky fellow, Tubbs," he said; "I was this moment going to write and promise the berth to Jacob Faithful, the member for Middleton, for a nephew of his; but your uncle's such an old friend of mine you shall have it. We're going down, a lot of us, to Llangarreg to-morrow; 9 A.M. Euston Station. Join us there. Capital thing. Look here."

Dumbrell went to his safe, and produced a number of little parcels carefully wrapped up in tissue paper. He placed them on the table, on which they rattled with a dull, heavy thud.

He opened out one or two of the parcels—yellow, glorious ingots of gold—and read from the labels upon them—

"May the 5th, 3 oz.
„ 6th, 5 oz.
„ 7th, 8 oz."

"We started a new Erlanger at noon on the 6th, and you see our production more than doubled."

"What's an Erlanger?"

"Oh, it's a new machine, invented by an American of that name. Splendid fellow, Erlanger. You'll see him to-morrow. He's down there superintending. Come, I think we may have a bottle of fizz and some luncheon on the strength of the new appointment. Thomas, run over to Simcox and tell him to send over a lobster-salad and a Stilton, sharp; and get up a bottle of Moët; and ask Mr. Parry if he'll come down and join us."

Under the influence of the champagne and lobster-salad; of the drive in Dumbrell's well-appointed mail-phaeton, drawn by a chestnut and bay, with magnificent shoulders and action, through the life and splendour of Hyde Park in

high season; of the stroll under the lordly trees of Kensington, to the music of the Coldstreams' band, amongst the fair women and shiny-coated men, the well-graced actors in the high booth of Vanity Fair; of the dinner in Onslow Square, served amongst sparkling crystal and bright flowers; of the fair, bright face of Bella Barrel, the sister of my friend the stockbroker, and the daughter of the house, my poor head, used only to the somewhat sombre life of Pea-green Street, Alchester, was in danger of losing its balance.

"If this is business," I said, as I sipped a winding-up brandy and soda at the Tavistock that night—"if this is business, count me in."

II.

THE misery of a long railway journey is considerably alleviated by a well-filled hamper, good cigars, and three companions who love a rubber; so we reached the Dolbrandneth Station on the Great Western line in good condition.

"Did you get my telegram, major, for the box seat?"

Dumbrell jumped out of the carriage and addressed the coachman, an immensely tall, thin man, with longer legs, more tightly draped than ever I beheld in mortal, dressed in a grey suit; a blue bird's-eye scarf the only piece of colour about him, if you except his glowing wrinkled-up face. With eyeglass in his eye he was glowering over the way-bill, whilst his faithful henchman was bustling about looking after the luggage and the passengers.

"'Es, I got it."

"You've kept the seat for me?"

"Been engaged for a fortnight," said the major, levelling his disengaged eye at the querist.

When I saw the exceedingly pretty girl who graced the box-seat of the Hie Away coach, I wasn't surprised that Dumbrell's telegram came too late.

Ah, never more amongst the hills of Wales shall we hear

the rattle of the coach, the hoof-beat of the well-mettled team. The steady trot up the long slope, the slate rocks bristling overhead, the Camlan fretting and foaming down below in the wooded gorge; the hills opening out into the peaceful upland valley; the dash down that steep hill-side, slipper on and break hard down—(gad, if anything should give way!)—the gallop along the level, looking back at the sweet lake of Mwynycil, pleasant retreat of Sybaritic trout-fishers, never more shall be ours save in dreams. Ah! now we are pounding up the steep pass, looking into the hoar recesses of the hills, and now by the little gloomy pool, resort of fabled giants, and now at full speed along the level table-land, glancing up at the clouds which hang about the seamed sides of Hennfynydd; and now, as the horses smell their oats, with more impetuous swing we rattle down the roads overhung with ash and hazel, the valley widening out, the river broadening, until the grey walls and blue roofs and smoke haze hanging in the clear evening air show us the end of our jouney. *Longæ viæ finis!*

When the coach stopped at the Royal Eagle Hotel, Llan-earreg, the portico and the whole front of the house was crowded with on-lookers. Big bearded men from California or Australia; swart men from Cornwall; black and sandy Cymry from the slate quarries, and the nondescript tourist variety—from all these went up a mighty fume of tobacco.

"See that little stout fellow with the wooden leg?—that's our captain," said Dumbrell as he swung himself off the roof of the coach.

The captain and a number of other men came forth to greet us. There was much hand shaking, congratulation, and gloating over a little ingot of gold which the captain produced from his waistcoat-pocket.

"Captain Williams, allow me to introduce Captain Tubbs, our new purser."

The captain took off his hat and made a flourish with the stump of his leg.

"Proud to make Captain Tubbs' acquaintance."

My poor father had served his country for five-and-thirty years, and even now was only a captain by courtesy; and here had I, a beardless youth, acquired the honourable title at a bound.

As we stood discoursing by the door, there came to us a tall sallow man with grave dark eyes, eyes which looked steadily into yours without winking, but which closed at regular intervals, and opened again with a snap. Dumbrell seized him heartily by the hand.

"Tubbs, this is Erlanger, the man who has opened out the great store of wealth which lies in the Welsh quartz. This is the inventor of the great machine called after him, the man who is helping to make our fortunes."

"Well," said the American, laughing, "I don't seem to care much whether I make your fortunes or not, if I can make a pile for myself. You'll see the machines at work to-morrow. The more gold you make the more there'll be for me. Let's liquor, for that't the correct idiom, isn't it?"

Erlanger dined with us, and proved a very genial companionable man. As we sat at our dessert in the bay window of the hotel, we heard a great row outside, and presently saw a little crowd of shouting gesticulating Cymry, the neucleus of which was a read-headed man, who rushed forward into the arcade of light which beamed from our gas-lit window, and, flourishing a hammer round his head, called out—

"Erlanger, you dirty old thief, come out and fight like a man, like a darned Yankee Doodle cockadoodle doo!"

And here our friend's excitement took another turn, and he began to flap his elbows and crow, to the accompaniment of shrill Celtic laughter.

The American grinned and turned to us.

"He's very wild to-night is Dominicho."

"Why do you keep such a drunken, impudent scoundrel in your employment, Erlanger?"

"Well, he knows more about amal*gum* than any man I ever knew. He knows more about the Erlanger machines than any other man in creation. You'll find it out when

he's gone; you won't get as much by half an ounce a ton."

"We'll risk that," said Dumbrell. "I fancy our captain here will work the thing as well as that tipsy—what is he—Irishman?"

"I'm hanged if I know what he is. I picked him up in Naples when I was making a tour of the European continent. I should say he was a cross between an Irishman and a Maltese, with a dash of nigger about him. Well, I reckon you won't be sorry to be rid of us, Captain Williams. You feel like the captain of a barque who's got the pilot aboard; you ain't quite the cock on your own quarter-deck, eh?"

"Well, indeed," said Captain Williams, "I hope she'll turn out well. I'll do my best for her; yes, sure."

After the table was cleared, we held a meeting of the Board. I took my seat beside the secretary with a bran new account-book before me. Dumbrell took the chair, and the month's accounts were submitted.

They proved eminently satisfactory. The Dolgarreg Gold, Silver, Copper, and Lead Mining Company had been in existence two months. During that time their operations had been principally confined to testing the quality of the rock and the dip of the strata. They had commenced driving a level, and were taking off the surface rock; and even from that, when crushed, they obtained a good percentage of gold. With only one head of stamps at work, and one Erlanger's machine, they had extracted, from a hundred tons of quartz, fifty ounces of gold. During the last week, when two Erlangers were going, the results had been still better; and on this especial day, from three tons of ore, nine and a half ounces of gold had been produced. The ingot itself, hot from the crucible, was produced—a tangible proof which could not fail to convince the most sceptical. The latter part of our proceedings was conducted in whispers, the door having been locked.

The result was so eminently successful that we looked at

each other in amazement. Was there not here "a potentiality of acquiring riches beyond the dreams of avarice?"

It was only a question of plant—more stamps and more Erlangers. Six new Erlangers had just been put up, making eight in all. These, under a contract with Erlanger, were to be paid for at the rate of £100 each, but Erlanger had also stipulated for a royalty of a twenty-fourth of the gold produced under his process.

"These royalties are the deuce," said Dumbrell; "there's the Crown royalty, and Sir Wigkin's royalty; and now this thing is turning out so well, we should try to buy up Erlanger. What will he take down, do you think? Call him in and ask him."

Erlanger came in: the question was put to him.

"Well, gentlemen, I've done a good trade with you, and I don't want to make a hard bargain. I calculate each of these machines of mine will work a ton a day. I calculate you make three ounces a ton—you'll make four or five, it's quite likely. Well, take three ounces; that will give me about ten shillings a day for each machine; with eight machines, that's four pounds a day. No; I don't think I'll deal. I like your mountainous country. I enjoy your hospitable ways: I think I'll stay among you for a while, and see after my royalties."

We looked rather blank. £1,200 a year out of our profits seemed so exorbitant for the mere use of a machine—the rent of a man's brains.

"Come, Erlanger," said Dumbrell, "let you and I talk the matter over by ourselves, and see if we can't come to some arrangement."

The two went out to hold a private conference, and presently Dumbrell returned, beaming.

"He'll take £3,500 down for the whole lot, and license us to use sixteen machines."

The Board drummed with their fingers on the table, in token of approval. A minute was unanimously passed

approving of the bargain, and the Board broke up and I went off to bed.

A peaceful night in the hill country; the quiet stars shining out, and the dim outlines of the hills soothing the soul, like the echo of distant music; and then the wash and gurgle of the river. But with a crash and clang, making night hideous, hark to the miner's band! Following that, a free fight amongst a dozen inebriated Cymry: much cry and little wool. But the wash of the river, the silent music of the mountain, lasts out these discords.

III.

How sombre and grey are the towns of the Cymry! huddled together in the valleys for warmth and shelter; visibly the homes of a beaten race, of an unsuccessful people. As I stood by the inn-door, in the early morning, grey stone buildings shutting up my sight in all directions, I felt oppressed with the weight of the dull, aimless, nerveless life about me. It was not till I had passed out of the little town, and on to the bridge which spanned the river, that I felt a rebound from this oppression. Looking down the stream, I saw a broad meadow, a quarter of a mile in length; on the north side ran the Deva, shooting over a shallow gravelly bed; on either hand there rose a sloping bank of broken hills, covered with ash, hazel, and oak, here and there showing a mass of primeval rocks. Amongst the trees peeped out the ashlar-built houses of the wealthy, and thereabouts grew the broad-leaved chestnut and the massive beech, and here and there the swarthy pine. Above rose cragged and splintered rocks, and a range of heather-covered heights, and, frowning over these, one dark point of Henfynydd.

A man was fishing on the stream, coming up the water towards the bridge. As he neared me I recognised

Erlanger. He came to me on the bridge, and sat down beside me on the parapet. He had a couple of dozen of little trout in his basket.

"There's little skelping creatures," he said; "but they eat nice, too, fried-up crisp."

He pulled out a cigar-case, and offering me a Manilla, he began to smoke.

"You like a pipe best, do you? Well, now, pipes are meant for leisure men, students and so on; there's too much machinery about pipes; your pouch and your case, and your wire for poking it up, and your stopper for ramming it down. I took to these Manillas out in India, and I haven't smoked anything else since."

To sit on a bridge crossing a sparkling stream, on a bright May morning, smoking a pipe, with a companion who is smoking a good cigar, comes as near to supreme enjoyment as a man can well attain on this side of the silent stream.

The man who smokes the cigar misses the subtle perfume, the divine aroma, and his joy is not perfect.

Amongst the hidden uses of things, I once thought I had discovered in the luxury and vanity, in the pomp and pride of the world, a compensating aroma for humble noses. But the weeds are so rank.

"What do you think of our mine?"

"Well, it looks well; but a mine's like a horse, you must back it at a long price, and can't expect to win every time. But if I had got some throw-away money I'd just as soon put it in that as in anything else. Have you got anything in it?"

"Only a hundred pounds in shares."

"Ah, that will be nothing to you; you won't miss it if you lose."

"I should miss it, though; except that and what my dad can spare me, I haven't got a rap."

Erlanger drew in a great mouthful of smoke and blew it forth through mouth and nostrils in a mighty cloud.

"I'd sell if I were you: what's the price now?"

"Our £2 paid shares were at 2 premium last night at the Eagle."

"I'll buy the half of them at that price. Twenty-five shares at £4, is it a deal?"

I thought for a moment. A hundred pounds in hard cash in my hands, who had never had even a five-pound note to call my own: and yet these Americans were so sharp. I looked at my companion: there was a kindly twinkle in his eye which determined me.

"I'll sell."

Erlanger took out of his breast-pocket a roll of notes, and picked out ten crisp new Bank of England ten-pounders, and handed them to me. We walked back to the hotel to breakfast. I mentioned to one or two of my friends that Erlanger had been buying of me at £4, and I heard afterwards the report sent the shares up another 10s., and that then Erlanger sold a little parcel of five and twenty, just to put him in ready cash, he said.

The Dolgarreg Mine was about eight miles from Llancarreg. The four-horse coach which ran between Llancarreg and Caergwyn passed within two miles of it, and I had arranged to go by that conveyance which started at 10 a.m., whilst the directors and a few local shareholders had chartered a vehicle for themselves, and were coming on at a later hour. It was early in the year, the stream of tourists had not set in, and I was the only passenger on the coach. To a man who had just emerged from the flats of East Anglia, I can't imagine a more complete enjoyment than the coach-drive of the night before and the one I was now taking. Passing over the bridge on which I had rested in the early morning, the road skirted the north side of the valley, till it debouched upon a triangular plain formed by the junction of two rivers. Here it took a sudden turn to the right, and, ascending the bank of the larger river, crossed it higher up on a grey-stone bridge. Then, bearing sharply to the left, it followed the course of the united rivers, now rapidly broadening into an estuary. The road did not run

upon the alluvial plain, but was terraced out of the overhanging rocks, which closely hemmed in the river-bed and the strip of water meadows which enclosed it, and ever and again it quitted the valley, taking to some parallel ravine, the disused bed of countless centuries ago. As we neared the sea and felt the soft western breeze, the road ran along the very edge of the river-tide some fifty feet below. The tide was nearly at its full, just rippled here and there by the wind; but in the sheltered bays from which the rocks rose precipitously, the hills towering above, the rocks and hills were mirrored in the tranquil bosom of this fairy lake. For lake it seemed, its outlet hid in the sudden turn it took, some two miles away, the hills wrapping it up on every side.

I don't think the scenery much impressed the merry little Englishman who drove the coach: flicking at the chaffinches with his whip, as they darted amongst the bushes, trying to upset an old man's wheelbarrow with the near hind wheel, double-thonging an unfortunate Cambrian who wasn't sufficiently spry in getting his waggon out of the way, he at length engaged in a wordy war with his horsekeeper, who sat behind, his arms folded, moody and sullen.

"Tombach, you old rogue, you were drunk last night."

Tom grinned faintly, but couldn't gainsay it.

"Would you believe it, sir?" turning to me, "I found the tipsy old wretch lying dead drunk on the floor of the stable?"

"No, indeed, Mis Morton: you big liar, how dare you take poor man's character away?"

"What!" shouted the coachman; "do you mean to tell me I didn't find you on the stable floor?"

"No, Mis Morton; it's a lie, indeed it is; I was in a stall among the straw quite tidy and comfortable." Here the coach gave a lurch, and Taffy had to hang on by his toes and nails, our facetious coachman having, in rounding a corner, of malice prepense, edged the hind wheel over a big stone, and, the coach being light, it gave a tremendous kick, and nearly pitched the Celt into the middle of a heap of

sharp loose stones. Tombach swore straight on end in good round English for five minutes. We excel in blasphemy, we English, and all races we come in contact with find our oaths more expressive than their own. The coachman laughed till he cried, and nearly upset the coach in his transports; recovering, he pulled sharp up by a one-arch bridge which spanned a mountain torrent, now turbid and white with powdered quartz.

"This way to the gold mine, sir; that path to the right, and straight up to the top of the mountain. Thankee, sir; good-day." And away went the coach, leaving me at the foot of Moel Vammer.

It was a stiff climb up the side of the ravine till I reached the secluded cwm, where the stream, which had been descending in a series of leaps, took a more placid course. Along the slope of this cwm the pathway ran, till taking another sharp turn upwards it lost itself on the bluff breast of the Vammer.

But I saw my destination, for, perched up on a shoulder of the mountain, I spied a cluster of huts and the outline of a big wheel; I heard, too, the muffled beat of the stamps, and the sharp clink of the miner's pick.

Part II.—The Way Down.

I.

It was on a Saturday that I commenced my first day's duty at the mine. It was not the pay-day, which occurred every other Saturday, and I had little to do except to stroll about the mine, watching the operations of crushing the quartz and the revolving Erlangers. My home was a little wooden hut, sheltered from the east by a rocky buttress. From the door I could see a broad strip of the Irish channel, the placid estuary winding up among the hills, the dark

precipices of Henfynydd frowning from the opposite side, and the mountains of Caerleon stretching out into the sea so far that they seemed like an opposing coast of dark blue hills.

The mine buildings were a row of wooden sheds covering the batteries of stamps and the Erlangers; at the further end was a small stone building, which contained a furnace. This was the laboratory, or melting-house, where the amalgam from the Erlangers was transmuted into glowing ingots.

The Erlanger machine was in the form of a double cone <|>, which revolved rapidly upon gun-metal bearings. A hollow tube, perforated with minute holes, like a nutmeg-grater, ran through the centre of the cone in a line with the axis: this tube was filled with quicksilver, the cones were filled with crushed quartz, and the machine started. By the operation of centrifugal force the quicksilver was driven in minute particles through the mass of quartz, picking up the gold in its way, till it became a treacly amalgam. By a simple mechanical contrivance the motion was reversed, and the amalgam driven back into the central tube. This is about as near a description of the actual machine as, with the fear of patent and other laws before my eyes, I can venture upon. Don't go and construct a machine upon the same principle; it mightn't answer.

There was a practicable but very rough road for carriages to the mine. I had the choice of ascending and descending the mountain daily, and taking lodgings at Llancarreg, to come backwards and forwards by coach, or of living in the little wooden hut, in a Robinson Crusoe sort of fashion. I determined on the latter course. The captain's lady kindly undertook to do my cooking for a weekly honorarium, which she afterwards claimed as a sinecure pension. Cooking! Ye gods! if to scarify, greasify, and filthify good, wholesome victuals, be cooking, let me be a Patagonian, and eat raw flesh. The commissariat difficulty didn't affect our worthy captain. He lived on tea and bread and butter, varied with

oatmeal; if he had a feed of flesh occasionally, he enjoyed it the more, greasy and sodden.

Dominicho inhabited a little hut partitioned off the machine sheds. He could there lie in his lair and watch the precious Erlangers. He generally spent his nights at Llancarreg, drinking and fighting, but would always be back at the mine ere dawn to start the machines. All day long he would lie in his hut, sleeping and drinking; but when evening came, and the result of the day's work was to be ascertained, he would crawl out and reel towards the machines. No hands but his might touch the precious amalgam; no one but he might regulate the speed of the machines and the consistency of the quartz paste.

Our directors came up in the afternoon, and Erlanger was with them. They brought hampers full of the materials of a picnic, and we dined on a jutting rock looking towards the sea. We had toasts and speeches afterwards, and were jolly enough, drinking success to everybody, and plenty of it. Erlanger was especially jovial. His swart face was lighted up with good humour. It was his last night with us, and he had in his pocket a cheque for £3,500, signed by two directors, and counter-signed by the secretary. I also placed my initials in the corner of the cheque—"*Entd* A. H. I.;" and one of my first duties was to enter into a handsome vellum-bound book—"Capital account, per Contra Cr.,

"By cash to Erlanger for Machines and Royalty redeemed, £3,500."

"Per Contra," also, a call would be necessary. Our nominal capital was £100,000 in 20,000 £5 shares. £32,000 of this capital had been paid up, and had been spent, and this was the way it had gone.

The vein of auriferous quartz was first discovered by one Jones, a quarryman. He confided the secret to two of his friends, who clubbed together their means, and got a "tack note" from Sir Wigkins. Having made a hole in the ground, their funds failed, and they sold the tack note for £150 to

another Jones. He and a mining engineer went shares in the adventure, and the latter, being well known in the City, succeeded in floating a company, to which they sold their mine for £30,000. Only ten thousand, however, were in hard cash, the other twenty were in paid-up shares; so the vendors of the mine retained a preponderating influence in it. Thus the only real capital of the concern was the public money, the remaining 16,000 shares, on which £2 had been paid. Then from 32,000 deduct 10 for purchase of mine, 1 for preliminary expenses, 10 for plant and machinery, 7 for tramways and waterways, 3½ for Erlangers, and you will see that a solitary "monkey" was all our available balance. We therefore had a board meeting that evening at Llancarreg, and decreed a call of £1 per share.

Reader, were you ever a capitalist, having a lot of money which you did not particularly want, and which you might invest in anything you took a fancy to? I was once, long ago, in Wales, with youth and health and pluck, and a hundred pounds in hard cash. And the rotundity and symmetry of my stock tickled the fibres of my heart, and woke into activity all my acquisitive propensities. After all those propensities are but instincts of self-preservation. To have a little island all to ourselves, to be safe from the seething tide, to be a little apart from the crush and clamour, from the foul blows and fetid smells of the battle—no, scramble of life, all our hope of such a happiness lies in our power to grasp and hold; else, strong swimmers as we may be, we must give up our souls in the dark waters; tall men and stout hitters, we must rot in the earth, trodden underfoot in the mad rush of fools. And so I very much longed to stick to my hundred pounds.

The impending call would reduce my capital to £75, not such a nice, pleasant sum at all; and then I was still liable to £50 unpaid on my remaining shares.

It was evening, about 8 o'clock, when our meeting broke up, and I made my way from amongst the excited crowd of speculators at the Eagle to the quiet bridge outside the

town. Erlanger was sitting on the parapet, in the moonlight, smoking. I lit my pipe, and seated myself beside him, and we sat some while silent. The moonlight had not reached the town, which lay in the shadow of the hill over which she rose: it lay there dark and grim, only an inverted cone of misty light rose up from the market square, where the shops were lighted up and the hotels were flaring with gas. The miners' band was playing in the square, and, mellowed by distance, the sounds were harmonious enough. "Home, sweet Home," was the tune they were playing, and the familiar tones carried my thoughts away to the little back parlour in Alchester, where my mother would now be sitting plying her needle, and my old dad would be plodding away at yesterday's "Times," ever and again reading out aloud some interesting paragraph. Erlanger, too, seemed to feel the tune, and his eyes looked soft for a moment.

"It's a pretty tune that of yours. Home! I guess, though, you English think too much about home; where a man's work is, that's his home, I reckon. I wasn't thinking just now of the store down Tennessee, where I was raised, but of a little white house in Ceylon, where I was coffee-planting; of a dark, graceful girl, and a little pickaninny rolling about in the shade. It's sixteen years ago I lost them; the youngster would be your age about by now. I always feel a kind of warmth to a youngster his age.

"Now look here," he said, laying his hand on my shoulder, "get out of this here mine; get your money out, I mean. It's all well enough for these smart City chaps, they can work the thing up and down as it suits them, and they always know how to get out in time. Sell the rest of your shares, this call has knocked them down to par, but you'll find plenty to buy them at that. Go to the Eagle this very minute and sell them all."

"But I shall lose my place if I do, I expect—to hold shares is part of my qualification. And Dumbrell has been so kind to me, and it looks like deserting the ship."

"Just look here, Tubbs, if Dumbrell says anything to

you," here Erlanger whispered in my ear, "*he sold out yesterday*, all but his bare qualification."

I walked back to the Eagle, and went into the landlord's little sanctum.

"Williams! I want to sell five-and-twenty Dolcarregs: what are they selling at?"

"Just par; do you want to sell at once?"

"Yes."

"I'll get you a customer at 5 discount."

"Done, I'll sell."

Williams went out and presently returned with a cheque for £43 15s., which I pocketed, and went to look up our captain; for we were going to drive back to the mine that night in the Company's dog-cart.

I went to six different public-houses, at each of which I ascertained he had just left; so I doubled back and caught him in the middle of his second round. His intellect was usually clearer when he was a little inebriated; but he was very loth to leave his friends, and I had a big job to haul him away. As we were starting from the door of the Eagle Dumbrell came out and stopped us.

"A word with you, Tubbs."

I went back into the hotel and he drew me into a private room.

"What's this I hear about your selling out your shares? Do you know, young man, that we shall probably dismiss a servant who has so little confidence in our Company?"

I felt rather foolish. After all Erlanger might have deceived me about Dumbrell, and I didn't like the idea of taxing him with his operation, as, if I were mistaken, he would probably cut off my connection with his Company then and there.

"I didn't think you would look at the matter in that light: the shares were mine to do as I liked with."

"Nonsense, Tubbs, you know very well that all our officers, directors and all, must hold a certain amount of stock."

Now I knew very well, from a careful study of the

prospectus, that the qualification of a director was fifty shares.

"Do you want me to buy the fifty shares you have left?"

Dumbrell started, turned a little red.

"What do you know about my shares?"

"Why, when the captain of the ship is getting out, it's time for the purser to look after himself."

"What do you know, Tubbs?" he said, taking me by the arm. "What have you heard? Do you mean to buy in now? Come, give me the office."

I laughed, and said, "Am I to be dismissed?"

"Dismissed, nonsense; I didn't know you were in the swim. Who sent you the telegram? Old Barrel? sly old dog, fancy his palming you off as a raw lad from Norfolk." What are you going to do, Bull or Bear?"

"I'm going to sleep on the bosom of Moel Vammer, that's what I'm going to do. Good-bye, old fellow."

We were presently behind the swish-tailed chestnut dashing along to Dolcarreg. As we crossed the bridge Erlanger was still sitting on the parapet smoking: he waved a good-night, and that was the last I saw of him.

II.

As a rule I don't think a sunrise is worth getting up for, but on this particular Sunday morning it was one of the divinest sights it has been my lot to witness. When I came out of the hut, I rubbed my eyes and felt myself all over, to assure myself that I had not passed away from the body and entered into a more ethereal world. For during the night a white opaque mist had drifted from the sea into the valley, filling it up with snowy vapour; the projecting shoulder, on which was my hut, was a little island, a heavenly eyrie; over and against me the purple heights of Henfynydd just tinged with pink, rose out of the vapoury sea, and behind me the crags of Mammer; but all the lower world was hidden.

The rising sun tinged the white fleecy cloud-waves with a pearly pink. One listened for the trumpet of the archangel; one looked for some wondrous sign of heavenly brightness; but none came. Only the soughing of the west wind, which came rustling in from the sea, shattering the heavenly ocean and revealing the living world below.

The broken masses of vapour rolled up the hill sides, wreathing away into invisible mist under the sun's more powerful rays, but still hanging in snowy masses in the deep rifts and cwms. The tide is half flood, and yonder, on the sands at Aber, is rolling up in long low waves tinged with the pure blush of morning: a schooner in the bay is working off and on waiting for sufficient water on the bar, and, on the stubby stone pier, those little black dots are the ship's husband, and the master's wife, and perhaps the little bairnies looking out for dad. Is all well on board? Is all well at home?

After the splendour of the morning the day dragged somewhat. Happy as is the bachelor's Sunday morning, the protracted, dawdling breakfast, the leisurely pipe afterwards, the uncut "Field" to open and discuss, the tankard of Bass to restore suspended animation, yet about the time when the well-dressed crowds are thronging out of church or chapel there falls upon one a sort of blankness. Just as the schoolboy who has played truant in the bright spring morning, loitering back, espies his brisk schoolfellows, with their satchels, hurrying home to their midday meal, and thinks, "Ah! it would have been all over now, and no probable birching to encounter;" so did I, with the traditions of a Puritan ancestry hanging about me, feel a little quivering of the spirit at having spent what my grim old grandfather would have called a "godless Sunday." And then, too, to a lonely man the fresh bonnets and pretty faces, the rustle and flutter of womankind about one, the pleasant contact in the church porch with dainty muslin skirts and cunningly embroidered jupons freshen one up and bring a gleam of brightness into the day. Yes, I ought to have

walked off to Llancarreg and gone to church. Then, too, perhaps, I could have faced that dish of woolly chops, simmering in grease, which Mrs. Captain Williams had prepared for my refection.

Nearly all the men employed in the mine were Welshmen, but amongst a number of hands who had just been taken on were two or three Irish, who, having been turned off some railway works in the Principality, had found their way to Llancarreg. Their engagement and my arrival had happened at the same time, and, I afterwards heard, had been connected in the minds of the Welsh miners with a fancied scheme of supplanting their own captain and themselves with a hated Sassenach chief and still more hated Gwyddelod.

Wales has no local traditions—none but the most puerile at least, and those mostly vamped up by native dilettanti; but deep in the mind of the Cymry is a hatred of the Gwyddel, or Irishman. Just as quarrels between near relatives take a more embittered and venomous form than broils amongst strangers, so does this kindred tribe of Cymry hate its cousin the Gael. I don't think the hatred is reciprocated, I don't think the Irish care a button about the Welsh one way or the other; but certain it is that the Welshman will endure the seed of the trailing serpent, his English neighbour, rather than an Irishman. The cause may be sought in the fact that in that fierce contest for the soil caused by the swelling wave of eastern conquest driving all the outer circles of population one into the other, the Gael, though harried out of Western Britain and forced to cross the sea, must have left many scattered remnants of the race to carry on a predatory war with their conquerors; and in their turn to be hunted down like wolves whenever the petty squabbles of the Welsh chieftains allowed them to turn their energies to the merely useful purpose of establishing internal security.

The Welsh miners lodged for the most part at the foot of the mountain in a hamlet which lay close to the bridge

which crossed our stream; there they had a chapel of their own, and a little public-house. The natives would not receive the Irishmen into their houses, so we had run up a bothie of planks and turf, in which they lived. One side of it was formed by a precipitous wall of rock, and the other faced a steep slope covered with loose and shifting stones. The pathway from my hut passed immediately in front of the bothie, and so on to the mine buildings: there was no other access to my hut than this, except from above by the steep grassy slope which led to the summit of the Mammer, but to reach that slope from the side of the mine involved a detour of some mile and a half.

I was sitting dull and disconsolate, smoking a pipe in front of my hut, the day was overcast, the wind had got round to the north-east and was howling dolefully amongst the rocks; a drizzling mist hid the summits of the hills and was fast wrapping up the landscape in gloom. To my home-staying mind the sense of loneliness and desertion was almost overwhelming, and the mist seemed to be fast cutting me off from all the living world. I was startled by a pebble which dropped on my hat; another followed, and, looking up, I saw half way up the slope, and just within the line of driving vapour, the flutter of a woman's petticoat.

I sprang quickly up the steep and slippery slope, but the female form had disappeared; higher and higher I mounted, the fierce sleet cutting into my face like flicks from the point of a whip, but still no sight of the petticoat. I had now lost sight of my hut; and though but a few hundred yards away, I might as well have been miles distant. I was no mountaineer, had never been in cloudland before, and was puzzled and confused at my position; there were some awkward precipices to the right and left, and the gloom of the mountain top struck me with awe. At this moment I heard a gentle "cohoo" from above, and striking upwards in the direction of the sound, which was renewed every few minutes, half an hour's scramble brought me into a little plateau; a rough heap of stones and rugged wooden staff

stood out dimly against the lift of the sky. Crouched under the lee side of this heap of stones was a woman.

After scrambling up to the top of a mountain in the track of a young female, one wouldn't be likely to be very particular about an introduction; so, plumping myself down on a stone close beside my fair unknown, I took hold of her hand; her face was muffled up in a yellow bandanna handkerchief, and with my other hand I ventured to push this back, and caught sight of a dark handsome face lighted up by brilliant black eyes. She jumped to her feet.

"You make too free, young Sassenach!" she screamed into my ears. The roar of the wind above us blew the words straight from her mouth into the great void. It was necessary to scream to be audible.

"I beg your pardon——"

"What?"

"I beg your pardon."

"Oh!"

We looked at each other's eyes for the first time: we laughed.

Really there wasn't room for two people to stand sheltered by the heap of stones except edgewise close together. Under these circumstances I could not avoid offering my companion the support of an arm. Her waist was very tiny, round and firm, the arm which went round it was almost as large, it would have gone twice round had I two elbows. To hear a word one must put one's mouth close to an ear, to an ear peeping out of a wealth of dark hair, dishevelled by the wind. On the top of a mountain acquaintance ripens fast.

"You must go away, young Sassenach, you who are so bold; no, I mean it. You must go away to Llancader now, directly in a minute, for my countrymen are arming to drive you away. Anwyldad! and perhaps they will kill you. Oh, go away—run at once!"

I didn't understand her, didn't know what to say; but she evidently expected an answer. She put up her face as I

stooped down to speak. I attempted a shout, but—it was so much easier to kiss that glowing upturned face.

She took hold of me by the collar with both hands and shook me well.

"Silly boy! I want to save you; follow me—come."

And she broke away and ran down the hillside. I followed, squashing through the spongy moss, her gleaming skirt my only guide.

We came to a little rift, a water-course, now dry, quiet and sheltered; we could hear our own voices.

"See," said my companion, "follow this track; it will bring you into the old hill road to Aber; you can't get wrong then; keep straight on; don't try to get back to Llancader; there are men watching for you."

"What men?"

"The miners; they have sworn to drive you and the Irish out of the country."

"But where are the police, and the magistrates?"

"Police! dearanwyl! the poor boy! don't trust to the police; do you think they'd venture on the Mammer, even if you could find one or two in the next six hours? No, my poor dear, you must go right away to Aber this very minute."

"And what will they do with me if I don't go?"

"Listen: there's a steam tug in the harbour, the master is a brother of one of your miners; they will tie you up and put you in a cart, and carry you to the creek, and then they'll pitch you and the Irishmen into the hold, and you'll be at Holyhead before you see the daylight again."

"The d—d brutes!" I said, grinding my teeth and stamping with impotent rage.

"No," she said, "not brutes; they're my countrymen, and I have two brothers among them. Away with you! Good-bye!"

"Stop, my dear; you've been very kind to me, and I don't even know your name."

"Margaret—Margaret Roberts."

"And, Margaret, why did you come to tell me of this?"

"Why?—well, indeed, I don't know; but I didn't lik to see a nice boy ill-treated. But I must go now; moth will miss me. Good-bye! and start away."

"Margaret, I can't go; you must show me the way bac to the mine, there's a dear!"

"No, ca_ ain; indeed you mustn't go back! Don't, o don't go back! You may go back to-morrow—to-morro in the morning early, but not to-day, no, no!"

She took my arm and pushed me a little way along the path to Aber.

Once more my arm was round her waist, and I kissed her on each of her glowing cheeks.

"Good-bye, sweet Margaret! a Sassenach doesn't leave his post; but you're a dear kind girl. Good-bye, anwylbach!"

Ah, how easy to learn is the language of love! Half an hour on the hillside with a pretty girl would give one a better grounding in Welsh than a whole course of lectures from the (future) professor of Celtic literature at Oxford.

"Up the hillside till you cross the stream, and then down a path to the right," Margaret called after me as I strode away.

In my hut once more, with time to think. The prospect of a physical danger not actually present generally acts as a stimulant to the nerves, and it was so in my case. I felt exhilarated at the responsibility and peril to be faced. True that if one succumbed quietly and allowed oneself to be tied up into a bundle and pitched neck and crop, with two or three odoriferous Irishmen, into the hold of a greasy brig, one would probably escape with only a few hours' detention and inconvenience; but surely no man could submit to such indignity: better be knocked on the head at once. No, I swore to myself, this amusing little comedy, this farce of an attack upon four unarmed men, should turn out a tragedy indeed, rather than the plot should succeed. But I must think how they are to be met. Let me see: last night, when I sat on the parapet of the bridge at Llancarreg, and saw the moon rise over the flank of Henfynydd, it was

eight o'clock; I heard it toll from the church tower; now the moon rises an hour later each night, and to-night it will rise at nine. At eight it will be pitch dark, and then the attack will be made. It is now four, and I have four hours to prepare. But, first, let me arrange my private affairs. I had in my pocket about a hundred and fifty pounds in notes; these I placed in my tobacco-jar, and filled it up with loose papers and stones; I then went behind my hut to find a suitable *câche* for it. The rock behind had been partly quarried out to make room for the hut, and some loose rough blocks of stone were lying together. I raised one of the smaller of these blocks, and placed my jar in a crevice, replacing the stone. Yet, although my notes would be safe enough there should I survive to look after them, yet in the event of my being knocked over, they might lie till the day of judgment; and I didn't care to make either the Bank of England or a Welsh miner my residuary legatee. I must write to Tom and tell him where the deposit was, but must also provide against the possibility of my papers being overhauled by the victors in the fight, who could likely enough read English, and who had probably heard of my having received a good deal of money. Yes, it would do Tom good, poor fellow; pay off his Cambridge duns and set him on his legs. I would write him a letter in French, and leave it in the captain's hut. The captain and his wife had gone to a preaching meeting miles away, were coming back next day, and had left their hut in my charge.

I wrote my letter to Tom—

"Mon cher Tom,—Derrière ma hutte à la mine de Dolcarreg, cette hutte avec le toit de feutre, il y a une pile de grandes masses de pierre. Otes la plus haute pierre, c'est une pierre pyramidale, et tu trouveras un pot de tabac; fume le tabac et garde le pot en souvenir de ton frère.

"Alfred."

and felt more comfortable. Now for our means of defence. Could I rely upon the Irishmen? Why, of course, I could.

Who like an Irishman, on your right hand or your left, in the supreme press of the fight, if you have but the he[art] and the pluck to show him the way?

The three Irishmen were snoozing on their blankets in the little bothie. When I called them they came blinking into the light. What is there about the Irish, the true aboriginal face, which gives one such an idea of age, of an aged and timeworn race; as though the same souls had been used up in other bodies for countless ages, and now looked out sorrowfully through the dim fleshly eyes, wearying for their final release. There is the same look about the Tartar.

Their dull wooden faces lighted up when I told them of the fight in prospect.

"Be Jazes, we'll stand by the captain! Just wait while we get our sticks; a fine oak saplin' I cut in Kilabeg, yer hanner—'twill suit the Welshmen's heads, begorra!"

There were three of them, as I said, John Moriarty, Sam O'Connor, and Peter Blake. John had a red head, and was the only one of the lot who could open his mouth, and he was not very communicative. They went to find their sticks, and came back looking blank.

"The sticks is gone, yer hanner."

They had come up the day before a consignment of picks for the miners' use. The picks were gone.

"They're not gone far, I'll bet," I said. "Master Tully wouldn't carry those heavy picks a long way; but it might take us a week to find them."

"What will we do without our sticks?" spoke the Irishman, doubtfully.

There were plenty of boards and rafters, and there was a circular saw on the premises; but what use is a slip of deal board in a man's fist? If we could only find the picks their handles were of stout, well-seasoned ash, fitted to withstand the rough jar of the strike on the solid rock. What could they have done with them? They must be somewhere close at hand. A white footprint gave me the clue. Within the shed which contained the stamps, at one end, the near

end to the Erlangers and Dominicho's den, was a huge conical heap of quartz, pulverised to the consistency of a coarse powder. The man who had hidden the picks had trodden in a little puddle of water formed by the dripping of the trough which ran overhead to supply the big wheel; he had trodden into the heap of white quartz powder, and had left the imprint of his foot in white paste on the store-house door-sill. A few prods with a long lath soon discovered a hard lump in the middle of the pile. The picks were there, sure enough. We had the heads off half-a-dozen in a minute. Why would not we use them as they were? Well, a pick is not a handy weapon in a free fight. You may probably knock over your first man, probably make him a subject for the coroner; but then you are done. Now, with a handy cudgel you may, if you are lucky, knock two or three out of time.

Dominicho was not in his lair; he had no doubt gone to Llancader to drink, and would not be back till morning, probably.

What were our chances of holding our position? I examined the ground carefully. The plateau on which the mine buildings were erected—partly a natural terrace, partly quarried into the solid rock—narrowed suddenly at the end the furthest from the road by which you entered. In the narrowest part, with just room enough in front for two people to pass, stood the Irish bothie. A jutting rock cut this off from the little nook which held my hut, access to which could only be gained by a narrow path cut in the face of the rock. The escarpment of the mountain below was not perpendicular, but sloped at an angle of about 70 degrees. Evidently the defensive position was the little terrace on which stood my hut. It had also the advantage that retreat was possible; the grassy slope which led to the summit of the Mammer might enable us to escape the result of a defeat. I took no counsel with my forces, nor did I form any elaborate plan of defence. A great general cares not for advice, his plans are always simple; but his the keen eye

which sees the supreme crisis, his the firm hand which hurl the thunderbolt of war crashing through the weak place i the enemy's array.

I had also learnt a lesson from the merry little coachma who had driven me to Dolcarreg.

"Now, sir," he said, "if ever you 'as a row with a Welsh man, and you sees as it must end in a fight, don't you g and talk with him, and argue with him; he'll talk himsel into a rage, and get his dander up by degrees, and pr'ap he'll end by giving you a licking, for they're bad to bea once they get started. But jest you go quietly up to hin and give him a good smack in the face—you'll knock all th fight out of him; he'll get under the table and roar fo mercy."

This saying had I laid up in my mind, and it bore frui afterwards.

III.

It was now five o'clock; the heavy clouds which ha hung around the hills parted for a while; there was fai weather and bright sunshine far out at sea; the sun, de clining in the west, lit up the broad reaches of shinin yellow sands below; the flood-tide was beginning to mak Far out at sea, the purple hills, their bases hidden in light ethereal mist, shone out like the mountains which ris from the heavenly horizon.

Just now, in Alchester, my mother and dear old dad wer taking their early tea, the old woman made up for evenin service, with her Bible and Prayer-book by her side, all th places looked out.

The steam-tug anchored in the tideway was swinging t the flood. From the black smoke which her funnel emitte she was evidently getting up steam.

A thought occurred to me: our friends would no doub choose the darkest part of the night to make their attac upon us. What an advantage it would be to us in our fina

rush if we could have a good bright light thrown into the faces of the enemy! Amongst my schoolfellows at Alchester I had been noted as a skilful firework-maker. We had two good hours before us, and it would while away the time at all events if I tried to make a Bengal light. There was plenty of powder—barrels full; there was also sulphur and antimony in the laboratory. The powder must be pounded. There was a big mortar, but it was iron, and pounding gunpowder in an iron mortar is not always good for the eyesight; but O'Connor didn't mind the job, and I gave him only about half an ounce at a time, and as he had no whiskers to singe, and such an ugly mug that you might have rubbed him down with a red-hot poker without spoiling his complexion, I felt quite easy about him. With the office ruler, and gum, and unlimited writing-paper, I made half-a-dozen very respectable cases; and we had mixed the composition, and filled and rammed them by seven o'clock; and then I withdrew my forces into the hut, and waited events.

The slight break in the weather had been only a temporary lull; again the wind was howling, and the mist and rain were driving furiously athwart the mountain-side. Not a pleasant night to be out; and I began to hope that our Celtic foes would not face the storm.

In a waterproof coat and leggings I scrambled to the edge of the cliff and listened. I could, ever and anon, when the wind abated, hear the dash of the swollen brooklets, and now and again the bleat of a mountain sheep. Stay: in that momentary hush I distinctly heard a human foot-tread—a loosened stone I could hear clattering down the mountain-side; but next moment the soughing of the angry wind obliterated every other sound. I crept back to the hut, and administered a ration of whisky to the whole of the forces.

"Now, boys, you'll just keep quiet till you hear me whistle three times, so, and then you'll just follow me."

"We'll be there, yer honner, never fear!"

But it was a false alarm. Tired of waiting, I ventured

into the mine works. All was quiet there, quiet and dark. But hark! By Jove! they're upon me! A confused clatter of footsteps, and I was surrounded by a crowd of dark moving forms; but I was not recognised, and stole quietly away round the rocky corner, and safe. It was now almost calm, and I could hear the tramp of many men. They halted at the further gable of the bothie, and there was a sound of picks at work against the walls—soon a slight crash as the roof fell in, and a rush forward of men. They intended to catch the Irishmen in the ruins of their cabin. They were evidently posed at finding nobody at home. I could see a dark cluster of men, and hear muttered tones.

The time had come; thrice I whistled, and then lighting a vesuvian, fired my blue light. For a moment it smouldered, and then brightly blazing up revealed the whole scene; the rocks and crags around, the crowd of men with blackened faces. At my signal the Irishmen ran out; the Cymry stood blinking at the dazzling light. As I ran forward into the middle, flinging the blue light into the thick of them, the whole scene disappeared into intense blue-black darkness. A flash of intense brightness seemed to dart into my brain, a noise and whiz as of a thousand steam hammers. I fell on one knee, then seemed to sink away altogether, clutching at the terrible shapes which floated in the unformed void through which I fell.

I next remember awaking to consciousness in my hut, a couple of tallow candles were flaming and smoking in the draught, upheld in beer bottles. John Moriarty was standing beside me with a basin of water and a wet rag in his hand. The other two were seated on the settle by the fire. They were refreshing themselves by occasional applications to my whisky bottle. Fah! the smell of that Irish whisky! Far from averse to other condiments, even now the taste and smell of Irish whisky inspires me with unutterable disgust.

"We bate 'em finely, yer hanner, the dirty Welsh black-



John Moriarty was standing beside me.

guards; but whisht now, you'll do beautiful, av you'll only be 'asy and quiet."

John, with skill and tenderness, adjusted the bandage round my aching, throbbing head.

"But, John, how did you manage to drive them away, there were such a lot of them?"

Well, yer hanner, we were routing them and bating them finely, but what frightened the souls out of them was a mighty scream from behind them, and the sound of two or three men rolling over the precipice, and then they ran, yer hanner, and Peter Blake and I, yer hanner, we druv 'em right off the mountain."

So I fell asleep in the arms of victory, and woke next morning with nothing but a bandage round my forehead and a splitting headache to remind me of the battle.

But they found Dominicho at the bottom of the height with his neck broken. A knife was clenched in his hands, it was covered with blood, and there were traces of blood on the rocks above. Clearly the miners had turned Dominicho out of his lair; his must have been the footstep I had heard the night before, before the others came; and Dominicho in his fury had driven his knife into one or two of the Cymry. Hence the diversion which had secured us the victory. Whether he had tumbled over the rock, or been hurled over by the infuriated miners, we never knew; nor did we learn anything about the wounded Welsh: they kept quiet enough. There was an inquest of course, a Welsh jury empanelled, and a verdict, "Accidental death," and there was an end of the matter.

The death of Dominicho threw Captain Williams on his own resources in working the Erlangers. We were rather short-handed on the Monday, but there was plenty of stuff to work up, and the Erlangers were busy all the day. Captain Williams suggested that as there was a dead man lying in the shed, the work should be suspended for a day, till the inquest had been held, but the "auri sacra fames" was upon us all. The directors would return to London the

next morning, and were anxious to have a favourable result of this day's work especially. Williams shook his head: "Indeed there's nothing gold hates so much as death; and I had a bad dream last night. It was a great preaching meeting we were at in the evening, and certainly there was some talk about the Diaoul—yes, indeed. But I dreamt that I was on the Mammer at midnight, and there was a bright light, and the Diaoul himself appeared in the middle of it, and it was just on the strike of the Cerrigwen vein, the one that's yielding so well; and he stood there and grinned at me, and he was for all the world like Erlanger in the face, and there he stood smelling the wind, till he gave a loud scream and struck his foot into the ground; and I'm frightened he's drove all the gold into the middle of the Mammer.

"Nonsense, man, you took a toothful too much whisky last night."

But Williams went about his business very gravely that day.

We were hard at work till late, and the night had come on before the amalgam was transferred from the machines to the melting shop. The intermittent glare of the furnace lighted up the keen City faces, and the warped and rugged visage of the captain, all anxiously bent over the glowing crucible.

"Well, captain, what's the result?"

He let fall the crucible, which broke into a dozen pieces on the floor.

"Dim byd." Nothing in the world.

A great storm of words broke over the unfortunate captain's head. He didn't understand his business; he had taken the wrong stuff, he was a stupid Welsh pig, he was a d—d rogue, and so on.

The captain sputtered and swore in his native tongue, and I thought we were in for a free fight, but the London men soon recovered their equanimity, and the irate Welshman was pacified.

"What did I tell you, gentlemen?" said Williams, mournfully; "the devil has struck all the gold out of the rock."

It really did seem it was so. From that day to this we never got sixpenn'orth of gold out of the mine, although our prospects were eminently favourable, and would have still continued to be so, had we had any more money to spend. When that came to an end our works were suspended, and also my salary.

Of course under these circumstances it was impossible I could think of matrimony. I therefore failed to reward the devoted Margaret with my heart and hand, but I had the pleasure of assisting at her wedding with a strapping young Welsh miner, who, having met with an accident on the night of my adventure on the mountain, was compelled to wear his arm in a sling, and had a nasty cut over his eyebrows. Being thus compelled to stop work, he thought it a favourable opportunity for getting married. We had a great day of it, and the whole population of the hamlet of Pen-y-bont got gloriously drunk on the occasion.

The Dolcarreg Mine is silent and deserted now. The skeleton spokes of the big wheel stand out gaunt and grim against the bare hill-side. Its water-ways are dry, its tramways are dismantled. It bears a bad name, does the Dolcarreg Mine. At night there are queer doings there. The big wheel begins to turn with dismal wheezing and groaning. The decaying stamps begin to pound and crush, smoke and flame pour out of the ruined chimney-stalk of the stone hut. In the midst of the stir, three human figures are seen darting forth away up the hill and round the top of the Mammer. They shriek and howl continually, for they are pursued by avenging fiends, and finally disappear in a glare of blue fire. One of the three is Erlanger, the second is Dominicho, the third is the wicked English purser. As regards your humble servant, however, the vision, if seen at all, can only be prophetic.

THE SECRET OF CALVERLEY COUR

I.

GUESS-WORK.

"I HATE a mystery, and I never understood a quarre my life." This enlightened sentiment and amiable d bility was proclaimed by a very fascinating person usually known in our family as "Mrs. James;" she was widow of my father's uncle, Mr. James Mackworth, a l of about seven and forty years of age, and the mother son commonly called the "Manchester man."

The Mackworths of Calverley were an ancient family, Calverley Court was a charming old place; but I had n seen Calverley—that was part of our mystery.

Old Gerard Mackworth, my Aunt James's father-in- had been left early a widower with three sons. The se had married, and he and his wife dying, their only c who was my father, was taken to Calverley, and t brought up as the darling of the house.

The eldest son distinguished himself in his professi the army—and married, when his father was seventy himself forty-three, a very beautiful girl, who, as Mackworth, gloried in her husband, and in the title he won. The youngest brother had also married, but h childless. My father was sixteen years of age whe uncle, Sir Thomas, married. He had been brought the old house surrounded by all the possibilities that e of his being the heir; and so great was his grandfat love for him, that if his eldest son's wife had had no fa

the old man, people were sure, would secretly have rejoiced. But Lady Mackworth could not accompany her husband to India because of the expected birth of an heir. Sir Thomas left her in the house in London where the child was to be born, and where his father remained waiting for the event.

Then came a terrible day. It brought news of Sir Thomas's death; his wife gave birth to a girl, and her life was saved only, as it seemed, by a miracle; then, also on the same day, after the infant's birth, old Mr. Mackworth was knocked down by a cab, and killed in the street. Lady Mackworth knew nothing of the last event for many weeks; but people thought she was reconciled to the loss by the fact of the child she held in her arms being the heiress of the whole Mackworth property.

It was, however, whispered about that Mr. Mackworth had openly rejoiced in the new-born infant being a girl, and he had been hurrying to his lawyer to alter the will by which the property was left to Sir Thomas, and entailed on Sir Thomas's children, when he met with his death. He had been heard to say that Roger—my father—should still be his heir; and that he should leave the girl seven hundred a-year, which was quite enough for a woman. He had been in the greatest imaginable state of excitement from the moment of hearing of his son's death, and of Lady Mackworth's illness. He was extremely fond of Lady Mackworth; but as soon as the birth of a daughter had been announced, he had congratulated himself openly; and he had started on foot avowedly to get to a cab-stand with the least delay, in order to give his lawyer immediate directions about his will. As it was, however, my father was left with a very small fortune, my Uncle James with but little more; and Lady Mackworth with her infant daughter went to live at Calverley.

Many years had passed since that eventful time. My father had been a hard-working man for more than thirty years as an attorney in London. He had become a partner at last in a well-known house, and he had lived as a widower

ever since a year after my birth. I was just twenty years of age at the period when this story begins. We had had for about ten years a Mrs. Ellerby to keep house and look after me; but my beloved Aunt James, the second wife of my father's Uncle James, was the one who was consulted as to all arrangements relating to me; and I loved her, and her only child, Cousin John, "the Manchester man," as might be expected. Uncle James had mended his fortunes by marrying, for a second wife, this dearly-loved relative, the pleasant and accomplished daughter of a rich manufacturer. On her husband's death, Mrs. James, in possession at that time of a considerable fortune, had taken a fine London house; and there she lived, summer and winter, and was as good as a mother to me. John lived in Manchester; he was a busy, successful man, very pleasant, very fond of my father, whom he called "old Cousin Roger," as he had been taught to do in his infancy, and very kind to me. John was twenty-seven, and Aunt James was two years younger than my father, who was her nephew by marriage, when she avowed her abhorrence of mystery and that inability as to a quarrel, which I have already recorded.

But notwithstanding Aunt James, whose sweet sunny face ought to have dispelled all mysteries, a mystery there was, and a quarrel there might be; but neither of one nor the other did anybody—not even, for a wonder, the people most concerned—seemed to know anything with certainty. Lady Mackworth, with Judith, who was now over thirty years of age, lived in good country style at Calverley; but we never went there. I had never seen the place, nor Judith, nor her mother. All I knew was that my father would not go. For several years Lady Mackworth had asked him always at Christmas, and civilly, but firmly, my father had always refused her invitations. Since I had left school neither Lady Mackworth nor Judith had ever been in London. We knew that, before that time, my father had seen them every year when they came to town.

and had been frequently staying at Calverley, and the precise date of the beginning of the existing estrangement was not known; its cause and its commencement was a part of the mystery.

Gradually, as I grew up, Mrs. James had ceased to go to lverley. "Oh! I am not a Mackworth," she would say, nd I need not go to the Christmas gathering. If I went would look like taking part against your father. I don't oose to do that, you, my dear Mary, being so dear to me; hn is a Mackworth, and he can go to Calverley when he eases; indeed he does go there very often; but he says at in the last two years Judith has grown very odd. Oh, was such a pity she did not marry Major Grey."

"Why did she give him up?" I asked.

"Part of the mystery; I sometimes think it was the beginning of it. Five years ago, the day was fixed; and the marriage settlements were made in your father's office. The bride-cake was come, and the trousseau was made. Judith and Major Grey had gone out together to look at the carriage on which their arms were being painted; they were to come to me here and lunch. She came to me alone. She said she had given up the marriage. She never told any one why she had done this. "By no fault of Major Grey," was all she would say. Major Grey came to me. I sent for your father. But, my dear Mary, your father was like a stone, impenetrable. He refused to see Judith. He refused to call on Lady Mackworth when she sent for him. I always thought he knew something of which he would not speak. Lady Mackworth took her daughter to Calverley, and they have never been in London since. Lady Mackworth has asked him to Calverley again and again, but he has never seen them since that time, I am sure."

This was all that at twenty I knew of the mystery. I used to feel sometimes that when my father was overdone with the laborious life to which he had not been brought up, he felt the hardship of it more than formerly. Also I

had adopted an idea that there was something a
father's conduct towards Lady Mackworth tha
honest-hearted Mrs. Ellerby did not like. She had
grown anxious when Christmas came, and vexed a
father refusing to go to the old home at that ti
when a Christmas passed without the usual let
actually shed tears. I had then asked her if she k
thing about this mystery, and she had answered,
enough to act, dear Mary. And then your father,
many men who are so really tender-hearted and ki
very severe when he thinks that severity is required
There is no getting at him, he lives inside such a
adamant as to this Calverley mystery." So the se
the mystery went on; and no one was ever more
than I was about Cousin Judith, and all that bel
her.

I wish I could make everybody understand how c
"Mrs. James" was. We usually called her Mrs. Ja
she was a bright, gentle, conciliating, forgiving
creature, who tempted one to take little loving liber
liked one the better for them. She was the happy
as to height, being neither tall nor short. She
lightest step and the fairest complexion ever know
when she dressed herself in her pretty matronly
looked like one playing at growing old. Ugly peo
were also malicious, said that she painted, and her
hair, with hardly a white line in it, looked as well
did, under the soft white lace in which she vei
daintily. There was always an exquisite freshn
Mrs. James; her garments were soft and flowing,
never a rustle nor an angle about her; in summer
of her cooled one like a delicate zephyr, and in w
look of her warm contrasts comforted one. Bu
and winter her sweet eyes blessed me, and I re
smile that I might tell her all I felt; in truth she
born to bless, and she was a blessing accordingly.

One December day, just as we were all thinki

coming Christmas, and had begun to make our usual preparations—for my father, though he worked hard to keep his place in life, was a man of bountiful charities—I had a note from Mrs. James. She told me to come to her that evening. "I shall send for you," she wrote, "at six o'clock." I was truly sorry, because I was very busy; for nowhere can Christmas be more thoroughly enjoyed than in London, among the hard-working gentlefolk, though they have to buy their holly, and may do without misletoe altogether. However, I left the store-room, where, arrayed in spreading aprons, Mrs. Ellerby and I had begun in good time to weigh plums for many more Christmas puddings than our own household required, and begun to dress for my evening with Mrs. James. She had directed me what to wear, and as I was to stay the night, she had added her choice of a dress for the morning. I always obeyed her in these matters, for that Mrs. James's taste was perfect was quite like an article of faith with us.

I stood before my father to be admired before I went. "How do you like me?"

"Very much, my darling," and he bowed with a touch of pretty ceremony as I drove away.

It was a blazing full moon. She was sailing along in the high-up heavens, and filling the streets with her brightness, as we turned corners, and came upon open places where the flood of her silver beams showed forth solemnly. A great winter moon in London is a beautiful thing, with a something belonging to it that is unknown elsewhere. There is the grand contrast between the calm above, where in her own great sea of light the majestic watcher holds on her way, and the current of life in the world below that affects one strangely. I felt it all very keenly. The Christmas was almost come; the holiday to the weary was very near at hand; the day of peace was to bless our hearts once more, and then came the thought of my beloved father, with the shadow of the mystery on his overwrought brow, and the desire that it might go rose in my heart like a prayer; and

so feeling I stopped at Mrs. James's door, and in a moment I was talking to Gosset, the good old trusty w servant who had come down to take possession of m capture my small bag and the flat parcel that contain velveteen gown for the next morning.

Aunt James's house had nothing oppressive abo beauty. You never felt the weight of its costliness. I full of the atmosphere of welcome, and the only thing wondered at, in the midst of wonders, was the great full of monthly roses in the angle of the stairs, and was nothing particularly overwhelming in that. Mrs. J sat at a table in the little drawing-room with a puzzled expression upon her face that amused me at

"Oh, such an odd thing, Mary," she begun. "Joh just come from Calverley. He came last night. H spent the whole morning with me. He is one of the men in the world!"

"Please to go on about Calverley," I said.

"Well; he brought me a note from Lady Mackwort will read it; 'I write to ask you once more to spend C mas here. I would ask Roger and his daughter, bu mystery of his persevering coldness makes any mor vances from me impossible. Judith, who might do s thing, has adopted many peculiarities of late years, an *will not*. 'I am not strong enough yet,' has been answer to me to-day. Has she anything to forgive R My utter want of knowledge makes me powerless. L go to a pleasanter subject. I spoke to John as t marrying, and was glad to hear that he thought of it his merry way he said we might call the lady Miss Jac but refused to tell us where Miss Jackson was. Judith John how welcome you would be. You might bring Jackson with you if you liked to do so"—then Mrs. J looked at me with eyes brimful of amusement.

I felt thunderstruck. "Miss Jackson!" I exclai "who is Miss Jackson?"

"That is the odd thing. There is no Miss Jack

said Mrs. James. "John had no idea of his joke being taken so seriously until he read Lady Mackworth's note. Now, what *are* we to do?"

Just at that moment the door from the larger room opened; a man emerged from the shadowy grandeur and stood in the light of the merrily blazing fire by my side. "Mary," he said, "will *you* be Miss Jackson?"

My aunt rose up quickly. I saw sudden tears glittering like diamonds in her soft eyes. She glided away by another door, and then John said:

"Will you be my wife, Mary? I have loved you a long time."

I cannot tell how that evening passed—perhaps nobody cares about knowing; but before I went home on the following day, when my father very gladly consented to my engagement, it had been settled that I was to spend the Christmas with my aunt *somewhere*; certainly not in London; and John had written to Lady Mackworth saying that he and his mother were coming—*and Miss Jackson!*

I could hardly call myself a consenting party. John was full of fun, and very wilful, too, on this matter; his arguments I *felt* to be not altogether ill-founded, yet I begged heartily to be allowed to tell my father.

"He can't let you go, if he is asked; *he can't*," said Aunt James.

"Lady Mackworth can't let you come, if she knows beforehand; *she can't*," said Cousin John.

In vain I asked *why?* I only got the same answer from both of them: "Your father, after his conduct to Lady Mackworth, could not let you go;" and Lady Mackworth, after your father's persistent refusals to go to Calverley, could not say more about your coming than she has said already."

Then John added what decided me:

"If the mystery is ever to be swept out of our lives, some sacrifice must be made. Let us get into the house, and let us then tell your father, and get him there if we can.

Besides," argued John, "as my wife you *must* see Calverley; and our taking you now will just be like a Christmas joke —as good as a play. You must go, Mary; Calverley is the dearest old place in all the world."

II.

AN OLD HOME.

"WELL," said my father, putting us into the railway-carriage, "let me hear from you to-morrow, if possible, and tell me where you have made up your minds to go. This is an odd fancy of yours, Mrs. James, to spend your Christmas away from your own good home."

"No; not odd," she said, smiling. "I am determined to see Christmas again in the pure country, where the great trees are standing still, and the earth lies barren waiting for the spring. Why, Mary has never seen a Christmas out of London! Look back into your life, Roger; do you never thirst for a true old-fashioned country Christmas, such as every year brought to you once?"

"I would rather not look back," he said with a chilling quietness. Then he gave me a loving smile, and said, "God bless you, Mary! Write to me as I said. Good-bye, darling!"

The railway whistle cut off further talk, and in an instant we were off, leaving my father with the smile on his fine face that I knew was my own peculiar property; and for a moment I gloried in my heart because he loved no one as he loved me.

We had left London early, and we had arranged to spend two days on our way to Calverley. It was not a cold day for the twentieth of December; there was rain falling in soft showers, sticking about the carriage-windows, and dimming the landscape. But we did not care for this discomfort; we had thorough enjoyment in our joke, and anticipations sufficiently vague to be entertaining. John

was to manage everything, and pacify everybody. Christmas was to come laden with gifts and glad with rejoicing; and, above all, I was to see Calverley.

We enjoyed our stay in the hotel of a great cathedral city. We went about through a calm, clear, cold air, with John, seeing sights; and then, on the third day, after luncheon, started once more by rail for Calverley. When we reached the nearest station, we found that a carriage had been sent for us; and a huge bundle of cloaks and wrappers supplied for our accommodation gave me a pleasant sensation as to Lady Mackworth's kindness. We were soon wrapped up, feeling very glad of their warmth, and out of the little town we went into an open road, and then through lodge-gates we entered on a two-mile drive through wood, and by water, skirting a great deer park, passing close to a picturesque farmhouse, and on into a gravelled road with a sloping bank of wood on the left, and a spreading lawn, dotted about with cedars and great evergreens on the right. I was speechless with admiration. The music of the merry echoing tread of the horses; the still, clear, cold air; the far-away blue quiet sky, and the trees!—the beautiful, wonderful trees!—giving me a sight unknown till then; for the soft rain of the evening before, and the frost of the night, had decked the whole landscape with silver trees; every twig gave forth crystal blossoms, and the great flat branches of the feathering cedars were bent down with their weight of loveliness. Not a breath stirred; I had never seen a hoar frost before, and I could have shed tears, so deep was my emotion at the grand, still sight that was before me. And this was Calverley! Immediately a thought crossed my mind of how much my father lost when Judith was born. But that could make no part of the mystery; for years, many years after that event, and for long after my birth, there had been no quarrel, no estrangement, no banishment from Calverley. I was thinking thus, when, suddenly in the calm, bright, frosty evening light, we came on a turn in the road, and a small church and its great

yew-tree, with every green point tipped with silver—the fairest sight of all—met my gaze. I gave an exclamation of delight; and then the church bells rung out, at first faint and uncertain, but quickly with clear, even notes, resounding among the hills. The carriage passed beneath a great granite arched gateway, and we drove rapidly up to the house.

Suddenly the recollection that I was there under a feigned name chilled me to the heart. I looked my fears straight into Aunt James's face. She wrapped herself more closely in her soft scarlet cloak, and settled her hands in her muff, saying, "I hope no harm will come of this prank." But as soon as the door opened, all fear seemed over. Everybody was so glad to see John. Every servant, including an old housekeeper in spectacles, was so unaffectedly charmed to see Mrs. James. How well she looked! How like old times it was to see her again!—and this would be a Christmas worth having!

Thus, amidst such prophetic welcomes, we got through the hall, and up the staircase, where stiff figures of men and women watched us from their picture-frames on the walls, into the cedar parlour, where panels of the sweet-smelling wood, dividing long pictures of tapestry, lined the room. The fire was blazing, the candles were lighted, bright-coloured tiles gleamed about the chimney, and a high mirror in a white and gold frame glistened from the mantle-shelf to the cornice; a gayer sight can scarcely be imagined, heightened as it was by the old-fashioned *chaise-longues*, and picturesque armchairs, all white and gold like the looking-glass, with crimson velvet covers.

I took one charmed admiring look round this "painted chamber," and then returned Lady Mackworth's greeting.

"This is Miss Jackson," she said.

"*My* Miss Jackson," said John, with emphasis, and a touch of merriment in his voice that might have told anybody, I think, that he was playing them a trick.

Lady Calverley, however, appeared not to notice his

manner, she only looked steadily at me. "My dear," she said, "we are going to be friends, I think. But I must speak with Mrs. James now. There is Baines: go, my love, to your room with her." Thus dismissed, and gently urged by a touch from John's hand on my shoulder, I went towards the door.

Before I followed the woman-servant out of the room, I looked back, and I saw what made me stop for an instant in absolute terror.

This last glance had shown me a door in the very corner at the furthest end, partly in the shadow of a large Indian cabinet, and in that doorway, which was open, was a woman in a dark dress, looking at me. She seemed entirely to forget that I could see her. She was looking at *me*, and me only. In my life I had never seen such a face. It was not ugly, but it was ablaze with an incredible curiosity, and an eagerness which struck me as inhuman. Whoever she was, she stood there holding one of those twisted wax tapers which we all know, and of which the coil was in her hand and the end lighted, and flaring up into her face. The strong lights and shadows no doubt disfigured her; but the sight struck me immovable, and I looked up in John's face for help. "Go to my mother's room; I will come there," he said. And so I moved away in a helpless sort of obedience, like one in a dream, yet hearing Baines say that my room was next to Mrs. James's, and that there was a door of communication; and that Gosset would sleep in the little tower-room close by. I made no answer; luckily there was no need of any; for in an instant I was left with Gosset by her mistress's fire; and, feeling in a strange wonder-world, at present inhabited by one dreadful woman's face, I sat down on the sofa and looked around.

It was a handsome room, with a low, long mullioned window, filled with diamond-paned glass, across half of which a heavy green cloth curtain was drawn, and the wintry heavens gleamed through the other. There were long, narrow, blue-looking mirrors, in white painted frames, in the room,

and I looked of a most ghastly complexion as I saw myself reflected in them. A nervous terror made me shudder—a distressing sense of being in the wrong place, and doing the wrong thing, overcame me. One thought after another chased through my brain, and I was overwhelmed with sudden misery. This was the place from which my father had gone in his youth to work for his bread in London—this was the home which, for years, he had refused to visit, and to which he had steadily refused to let me come. How did I dare to be there without his leave? What had I done?

I was thoroughly humbled by the confusion of mind that oppressed me. And at Christmas time I had ventured on this, when the thought of the wonderful Nativity should give us child-like hearts, and the contemplation of the Divine submission should fill our souls with obedience. What had I done?

I was more frightened and miserable than I can tell. And Gosset's shadow flitted on the wall, and in and out of those ghostly mirrors; and the glass in the great massive window reflected the fire at play, looking cheerful in spite of my subdued, humiliated, repentant self, and making flashing red and yellow darts, as if it mocked me. There I sat, speechless and appalled, while Gosset, astounded into silence by the magnificence of the old Mackworth home, laid out a velvet dress for my aunt, and a gay green silk for me.

But I could not recover myself. The thought of the deceit under which I had got entrance there mortified me; the feigned name became a horror; and the wonder as to what my dearly-loved father might say was just the one thing more than I could bear; then the door opened, and in came John and Mrs. James. I threw myself into her arms in an agony of distress.

"Hush, hush!" How she soothed me! "Lady Mackworth has been told," she whispered.

Very prudently Gosset disappeared, carrying my gown into the inner room.

"We told her that we *could not* ask your father. John did it so well." I looked at him through my tears, and forgave him, of course, upon the spot. "He said he had taken advantage of her mistaking his play for earnest, and as she had said his wife that was to be might come, he had made his proposals immediately, and brought you. Then he asked her plainly what was the nature of the odd estrangement between her and your father. John said that he had a right to know, and that you had a right to share his knowledge. And what do you think she said?" I looked up eagerly. "She declared, and, speaking of this solemn time, she took heaven to witness, that she did not know. That she had written asking him to tell her; Christmas after Christmas she had written asking him to come to the house where he had lived so long, where so many survived who loved him still; but he had always, in the fewest words, refused. Christmas after Christmas she had written again to ask what it was that had changed him, but never but once—the last time—had he answered her entreaty. Then he had written these words, 'I can never come to Calverley, till——,' then he left a long blank, of which she could not guess the meaning, then followed these few words more, 'I believe that I am incapable of injuring a woman. I cannot even contemplate the possibility at this Christmas time.'"

We looked at each other in a dumb bewilderment. At last John spoke, "Mary, how much do you know of your father's life in your childhood?"

"Nothing," I said; "except that he has lived in the same house, and been the best of men."

"Yes, we all know that," he said; "and nobody can doubt it. But, Mary, when did Mrs. Ellerby come to live with you?" I told him. "Did your father know her before?"

"He knew her husband," I said. "He was a surgeon; and I think my father was with him when he died. Why do you ask?" I inquired.

"Because Mrs. Ellerby knows something, I fancy."

"Yes," I said, "she knows of Lady Mackworth's invitations, and she speaks of Cousin Judith sometimes. But then she is fond of us, and a partisan, and wishes Cousin Judith had never been born!" John laughed, and said he must go to make himself fit to be seen, and so he left Aunt James and me together.

It had been arranged that our first meal at old Calverley should be a sociable tea; so when we were ready we went again to the cedar parlour—we were joined by John just outside the door, who looked me over with a pleasant scrutiny.

"I hope there are no pins out of place," he said; "Judith would discover the fact of a single hair being awry; she has been awfully soured, somehow; but don't be discouraged, Mary."

What a sudden comfort came in the fact of my old cousin not being there when we entered the room; for "over thirty" is an age of considerable antiquity to under twenty-one; an age to be feared, and criticised, and occasionally even taken offence at, if it arrays itself in pink, for instance, or indulges in any excursions into those regions of sweet simplicity where people wear white muslin and real flowers in their hair. When the door was opened, and I had had time to look around me, there was no Cousin Judith, and my spirit felt free again, and my quaking heart rejoiced.

One other glance I gave at the door in the corner. But a thick heavy *portière* had been drawn before it, and a long table loaded with cold eatables, with a brilliant lamp in the centre, stood in front of that; so I was safe and comforted.

This is *my* Miss Jackson!" exclaimed John now, in a tone of saucy triumph, the explanation having been made.

Lady Mackworth said, "In that, or in any other character, you are welcome; but most of all in your own." Then she kissed me, and I looked at her kind face, which was a sad one too, and felt that I *must* love her in spite of the mystery, and whatever the quarrel might be.

III.

A REVELATION.

THE room in which we stood on this evening of the twenty-third of December, cheerfully bright, and glowing with welcome, made one feel immediately at home. This sensation, always so indescribably delightful, belongs to the winter, and the winter only; and specially and undoubtedly to Christmas, in virtue of a hundred associations. Summer has no such gift as this with which winter is so happily endowed. The sun may tempt one out under the blue sky; it opens doors and windows, brings people together on lawns, and among the woods and fields, and perhaps takes them into the shadowy groves under pretence of closer companionship; but idle rest—a sort of enjoyable languor, a contemplation of the fulness of the earth—a feeling that in such an atmosphere one could live anywhere, get peace under the shelter of any rock, and rest, leaning lazily on any garden bench—these are summer sensations, utterly destructive of that delicious sense of home and comfort with which the welcome of a good house, properly conducted, blesses you in the winter time. All this was felt to perfection at Calverley. The sight of the plentifully-spread table, the fragrance of coffee and tea, the sufficiency of light, the agreeable glow on all that surrounded us, and the enjoyable warmth of the atmosphere made one wish to be confidential; quarrels were an impossibility in the world of that cedar parlour; and as for secrets, who could keep them in the quiet kindness of that genial welcome? When Lady Mackworth kissed me and said, "I wish your father was here," I wished it too, with all my heart; for I felt that not anything could be more likely to melt away all stiffness from his heart than the glow of that house, in the Christmas kindness that had begun to gleam upon us.

"Where is Judith?" asked John. And then I began to remember that there was an unexplained mystery which we

were there to discover, and again I wondered if the face I had seen in the door-way was our cousin's.

"Judith will not appear to-night," said Lady Mackworth. "She is tired. She has helped to give away our dole to-day. It is an old custom, my love," she said, turning to me. "It lasts from ten in the morning to four in the afternoon. Beer, beef, and bread, and to some who have been born and who have lived on the property, money. To-morrow, being Christmas Eve, the clothing and blankets are given away; Judith wishes to give that also with her own hands; and this year she adds to the usual gifts a piece of gold—ten shillings to every child born since Christmas last. I am glad; for she has shrunk for several years from all exertion—she lives like one in a sad dream."

Lady Mackworth's face grew hard as she said this. I looked at her attentively. She had still considerable remains of the beauty of girlhood in her straight features and fair skin, but she looked singularly hard in the outlines of her features, and in the quick-coming little frown that contracted her face as she spoke of Judith. She was small and thin, and dressed in rich soft-flowing black silk. Her hair was as white as snow, and over her cap was thrown a little black veil of exquisitely fine lace. She was perfectly upright, stiff in the back, and small in the waist; and when she spoke of Judith living like one in a sad dream, the white eyebrows contracted, and her brown eyes were fastened on me with an odd, questioning glance in them.

I cannot now imagine how I dared to be so bold, but I said in answer to that look, "Has Judith's state of mind or health anything to do with my father, Lady Mackworth?"

She answered by another question, "Does Roger never speak of her?"

"Never," I said; "and such a strange silence towards both her and you cannot but have made me wonder."

"Yes," she answered, "there is an eloquence in silence even greater than in speech." And so saying she led the way to the tea-table.

We were all silent. But after a minute or two she went on, "I have no idea of what your father's feelings may be. I only know, as I suppose we all know, that he once loved Judith very much."

I dropped my tea-spoon in astonishment.

"Judith!" exclaimed Mrs. James, in the soft tones of a breathless surprise. And John came back from the side table, where he had been carving a venison pasty, with the knife and fork in his hand, and stood by his aunt's side. His whole face was lighted up by an amused astonishment. "We are the children of amazement," he said. "Don't take our appetites away, but tell us the whole after tea."

Lady Mackworth gave him one of those loving glances which are the rewards of spoilt children; and we began to eat, John keeping up some lively talk about the interviews he had been having with some of the old people on the estate, who always treated him as if he were still a boy, and so getting over the meal-time pleasantly.

I certainly longed for it to be over. My mind was full of my father. What should I feel when I knew his history better? I could scarcely pay any attention to John's merry talk, I was so occupied with more serious things. My father had always been one of my heroes. The story of his boyhood, and his hard-worked manhood, I knew very well. I knew the hard side of the picture, and something I knew of the short, sad story of his two years of wedded life; but I knew nothing of the other side—of new worlds of love and hope, I knew nothing; of the possible return to Calverley with a fond wife, and as its master, I had never guessed.

Of late years he had grown pale and thin, and he looked worn and weary very often; but I had never thought of anything weighing on his increasing years beyond the daily toil of the bread-winner, which he would never leave off. And then I began to recall his face and form; and I knew that, notwithstanding the often weary footstep, and the spiritless eye, he was one of the handsomest men that human

sight ever rested on; so thinking, I followed Lady Mackworth's eye.

"Look at that picture at the end of the room—the one on the left," she said; "who is it?"

It was the portrait of a youth of fifteen, perhaps, standing with his hand on a greyhound's neck. It was my father, as a boy, before his uncle married, when he was looked on as the heir of Calverley. I got up quickly, and went to look at it. The bell was rung, and we all stood talking of this really beautiful portrait as the things were removed from the tea-table. On the door being shut Lady Mackworth turned towards the fire, where easy chairs and sofas invited us, and sitting down she said, as she handed my aunt a fire-screen, "I was glad when I thought that, by a marriage with Judith, he would come into his own again; I was very fond of him, and very glad."

"When was it?" said Aunt James; "before or after her engagement to Major Grey?"

"Oh, before—long before; but I will tell you." She turned a little towards John and me, and went on—

"When you were five or six years old, Mary, and when Judith was seventeen, she was desperately in love with your father. I did not wonder at it. He was only thirty-five, and just the kind of character in which a girl like Judith would be sure to delight. He was superbly handsome, too; greatly thought of, and admired also; that kind of thing is very attractive to a girl just old enough to feel that she has a right to the attentions of the world in which she lives. It was charming to see how condescending Judith was to the really young men of our neighbourhood; how thoroughly she was appreciating your father's formed character and matured perfections. It made me very happy. Judith's character was one to be best perfected by a man who was older than herself; and I knew your father's excellence. I can scarcely tell you how the the courtship was conducted. It prospered. His rights here and his relationship prevented its being talked about. He had spoken to me. I knew

Judith's mind, and I should have been well pleased by an immediate marriage. But Roger *would have secrecy.* That was the beginning of woe. He thought too little of himself and far too much of all that a marriage with Judith would give him. He was not sufficiently confident. He wished her to see other men—the world—London. He would only have her on his own terms; yet all was for *her* sake, that *she* might never repent, that *she* might never make him regret that he had listened to the tender flattery which, he said, surrounded him in this place. Thus he kept things dawdling on till Judith was twenty-one. Even then he would not speak of marriage. We were in London, and that year he spent a few weeks in the autumn with us here. Then when he went away, I know that Judith was extremely disappointed that he could not trust her yet. Nevertheless, before going, he had spoken to me with more of a lover's ardour than he had ever shown before. But the spring came, and we were again in London. Judith had many admirers. Your father was much with us, but he gave place to others. He thought his hour of triumph was come; that Judith, having the power to marry many, would now choose only him. Then, one sad day, tired of being tried, she told him she had accepted Major Grey. I was miserable. I thought my heart would break; but Roger's conduct now was very extraordinary. To me he would show all his distress, shedding even passionate tears in his wretchedness; but to her, to Judith. he was the elderly, kind, almost parental friend; and during the one year which the engagement lasted he made Judith mistress of every detail as to the property, helped finally to fix the wedding-day, and took the preparation of the settlements upon himself.

"How good of my father!" I exclaimed; "how like his wonderful unselfish character! How noble!"

"It was nobility run mad, my dear girl," said Lady Mackworth. "Honest love should be honest spoken. And that continued weighing of earthly possessions against the pure love of a woman's heart is but a narrow-minded thing,

and should be called selfishness as often as nobility. If Judith had not been rich and the mistress of Calverley he would never have tried her so cruelly. I thought Roger wrong, and I told him so. But there was nothing to say against Major Grey, so the day was fixed. You know the rest, I suppose. She came home to me one morning in London—she said she had given him up. She has never been the same woman since; and no entreaties from me has ever brought your father to my side from that hour to this. But there is a mystery somewhere. It is not only disappointed love. He now, I fear, dislikes Judith, and I believe he disapproves of me. His notes have had strange hints in them of something that might be done. It is the greatest of perplexities. *I know nothing.* I cannot even guess at what they mean—for Judith, too, has her mystery. Only the other day she said to me, 'He will come again one day; but I am not strong enough yet.' I said, 'Does it depend on you?' She only answered, '*I was born to a cross.*' What am I to do?"

It was impossible not to pity Lady Mackworth; but we could not help her, Judith was turned thirty, and, as we knew through John, whose visits to Calverley had been frequent, of a singularly silent disposition; leading her own life, full of charitable plans, never consulting anybody, and only bargaining that Lady Mackworth should make herself the mistress of the place, and leave her to follow her own way.

All this, by little and little, was that evening confessed to by her mother with a thousand tender excuses, so that we grew into sudden friendship, touched by the charity that sweetened all her sorrows, and by the hope that she often expressed that our coming would produce some good. So, imperceptibly, the hours wore away till it was time to go to bed.

IV.

A VOICE IN THE NIGHT.

We all left the room together; but, just as we were outside the door, Lady Mackworth called back Mrs. James, and John and I were left alone. He, knowing the house well, led me aside just out of the passage into a deep recess having a window, which helped to light that part of the house, and being fitted up with a table and two long sofas placed opposite to each other against the wall on each side as we entered. A lamp from the ceiling was shedding down a strong light, and we saw the tall figure of a woman looking from the window, which was uncurtained, out into the night. When she heard our footsteps, she turned round—"Why do you stop?" she said; "it is you, John, is it not?"

"Yes, Judith, and here is Mary," he answered.

She advanced a step or two, and then stood still looking at me, as I, indeed, also looked at her. She was dressed in a shaggy dark-brown garment, which covered her to the feet, and she held a black straw hat in her hand.

"Don't come too near; I am wet," she said; and then I observed that the long black feather was dripping on to the oak floor, and that the moisture stood visibly on her rough cloak. Before we could answer she had begun to speak again. "So this is Mary? What a pretty child it is!" And then she fixed her eyes upon me with a strange, sad, yet almost loving look, which contrasted greatly with the expression I had seen before, for now I knew that it was truly this same woman who had followed me with wild, curious eyes from the open doorway. But I had heard her story since, and I thought that the first curiosity, and now the sad welcome, were both in some degree explained.

"It is a thaw," she went on, looking at John. "Hark!" And so, listening, we heard the droppings from the silver trees falling with steady, ceaseless sounds on the stones outside.

"Have you been out?" he asked.

"Yes; hours ago Dame Margery sent for me. She nursed me when I was an infant, you know. I found her ill in the hospital in London once; do you remember?"

"Oh yes; I know her. You brought her here. I know her very well," said John. "Is she ill?"

"She is very ill. I promised to see her again. I only came back for something she wanted. I must go now." Then she again went to the window and looked out, as if unwilling to go, and such a weary face as she showed I shall never forget. Poor Judith! She was taller than women in general, with a strong face, and an extraordinary quantity of dark-brown hair, which glittered with a yellowish hue upon it in the strong light of the lamp that burned above it. I thought how handsome she would be if her face had not lost something. She put her hand to her head with a gesture of fatigue, as if mind as well as body was quite worn out, and then again she looked at me.

The dreadful vacancy that even disfigured her face quite shocked me. It was like the face of one who had lost her way. It so affected me that I said, "Oh, don't go; or let John go with you." It seemed something dreadful for this forlorn woman to go forth alone into the dripping night. "You are surely not thinking of going alone?" I said.

She smiled. "It is not far. There, just beyond those great cedars. I walk across the turf. It is not going there. It is not being alone. It is *not knowing what to do*," she said. "Mary," she went on, "once I longed so much to see you; once I loved you very much—there; don't come near me, child, with your pretty dress—I am dripping wet. But you bring back the old days, when I was no older than you are. But you and John believe in each other. And so, John, you had to play us a trick before you could show your promised wife;" and she gave a low laugh, which was very sweet.

"Oh, don't speak of that," I said, blushing. "Since I have been in this house I have been miserable about it. I don't now know what my father will say, but John must manage it."

I stopped, for I felt the awkwardness of having mentioned my father to Judith. She, however, did not seem to feel it.

"Is your father very strict?" she asked.

"He is honourable, and he would dislike using a wrong name even in a joke."

"Yet John got you into Calverley with his ingenious adoption of my mother's mistake; and you may tell your father that I was very glad to see you." Then again she said, in a dreary tone, "But I must go now."

"Come, Mary," said John, cheerfully, "it won't take a minute. It is only eleven o'clock. Go and change that gown for your travelling-dress; there are plenty of waterproofs. See, the moon is bright, and we will all three go to Dame Margery if Judith *must* go."

"I must," she whispered, with her eyes on me, as if wondering what I should do. Of course I had instantly decided to obey John.

"I will be back in five minutes," I exclaimed; and so ran off to my room.

I think that I could not have been more than ten minutes putting on my black serge and buttoning my waterproof cloak about me. My strongest boots, my thickest veil wrapped round my face and hat, a fur collar fastened close; and so equipped for a moonlight walk this Christmas night, I left my room, and found John waiting where, on a table in a corner, stood the chamber candlesticks and a lamp burning.

"Come this way," he said; and then I followed him down a turret staircase into a hall where armour hung on the walls, and the great antlers of some aged stags stretched out their jagged lengths above the dark, bright-polished doors. At any other moment I must have stopped to gaze and gossip; but now, on John's arm, I was pulled along, and we soon stood together beyond the house on the wide gravel by our Cousin Judith's side. She never spoke, but walked on quickly through a dense grove of trees, where

from the branches fell slowly upon us great drops from the thawing icicles that had made the world look so strangely bright a few hours before.

When we got out of the shadow we were on the short hard turf, with the moon throwing our shadows in giant lengths before us. Still Judith never spoke. But at last, after nearly a quarter of an hour of quick walking, she stopped and looked at me. "It is in the first of those cottages that Dame Margery lives. You enter them on this side; at the back is a road leading through the deer park to the town at which the carriage met you. Mary, she is very ill—she thinks herself dying, or I should not have come here to see her again to-night. Are you afraid?" I said that I had no fear. "Now, John," she said, "stand within the door, and do not let her see you. Her bed is curtained off. The woman she lives with, and who may be sitting up, is deaf; and the girl is at the house waiting for my return, and for the chance of my having anything to send back. I will peril all on what you may hear. What I have for years been wondering over, asking myself if I ought to utter it, seeking some one to say it to, she may say, perhaps, and you may hear. And then, John, act for me, and heaven bless you this Christmas time!"

She never stopped for an answer, but pushing the cottage door open, walked straight into the house. A dark, thick curtain was hung half across the room; and as she put it aside I saw, by the bright firelight, that a low bed had been placed close to the window, on which an aged woman was lying with her face turned towards us. Her eyes were shut, and for a moment I really believed that she was dead. I was going to rush forwards to a woman who was half asleep by the fire when Dame Margery opened her eyes and fixed them on Judith. She tried to speak and to thank her for coming again, but her words were scarcely articulate. The deaf woman roused herself, and stood up respectfully; and Judith, in a steady, soft under tone, said, "Tell me again, now, as you lie within a short time of the hour of

death, what you have already told me many times. As God shall judge you, tell me all you know."

"I can only say the same again," she said. "God can make all things right. But you are not Lady Mackworth's child. I saw her child dead, and who you are I do not know."

Then John went forward, and said, "You know me, Dame. I came to hear this that you have said. I have written it down as your dying statement—Judith is not the infant that Lady Mackworth bore in London—her only child."

"That child died," she said, with energy. "I had fifty pounds to see to its burial." Then she gave one deep sigh, and murmured some pious words which died away from her lips unfinished, for the end had come. The deaf woman in charge was by her side now. She took it very quietly, saying that old Margery had lasted longer than she had expected, and that she had felt sure she would never see another Christmas.

"I will send in Mrs. Jenkins," said Judith, slowly wiping the tears from her eyes. So we left the cottage.

John helped me up from where I had knelt down—for I could not see those last moments standing—and he said, "Keep with Judith. I shall go to your father directly."

His words startled me—go to my father directly—sent, as it were, by that voice in the night. I was speechless as I looked into his face.

Judith returned, and Mrs. Jenkins with her, who went into the cottage and left us there standing in the moonlight, which was now as bright almost as day.

"I can walk to the station, and be ready for the train to London which leaves there in an hour. I am going straight to our Cousin Roger, Judith; he must know this immediately," said John.

"And tell him," said Judith, "that I first heard this from Dame Margery, to whom I went to carry fruit and flowers in the hospital he knows of, the very day I broke off my marriage with Major Grey—*that was my reason for breaking it off.* But she could never tell me more than she said to-

night. A surgeon, whom I have never found, knew more, she said. And I did not tell Roger at once, because it was hard to believe she spoke truly; it was harder still to believe evil of one I have loved as my mother for so many years.

"Ah," she went on, "it is her loss that rends me—that she should have done that awful thing—that the marriage by which she wished to repair her sin should have failed. Tell Roger that it is not my own loss in this dear place that troubles me, it is the loss of more than a mother—the knowledge of her crime that has driven me to despair sometimes. Except on her death-bed I could never have perfectly believed old Margery. Tell Roger I believe her now. Yet it is not *I* who can accuse Lady Mackworth. I love her so—worse than an orphan though I am!"

She turned away towards the house, and John, giving my hand one loving grasp, and looking a thousand kind promises into my face, sprang over a low gate that led from the cottage-garden into the road, and was gone. I went quickly to Judith's side, and walked away with her. We neither of us spoke till we reached the house. Two men-servants were standing within the door, and as we passed through she said, "Mr. Mackworth is gone to London. He has walked to the station. Good-night."

We went up-stairs together, and she stopped at my room-door; I felt that I could not leave her. "Let me come with you," I said; "I only want to see Aunt James first." She smiled, and put her candle down on the table as if she were willing to wait. I found my aunt sitting up, looking bright and beautiful as was her way.

"Oh, you runaway," she said, "where have you been?"

"I am here now, just come back!" I said.

"Then go to bed and get to sleep quickly." So I kissed her, and got back to Judith. Her room was not far off, and we sent Baines away, who was waiting there.

The aspect of the apartment was more that of a sitting-room than a bed-room. It was full of books and pictures, having a little canopied bed in one corner with gay rose-

coloured satin furniture, looped back with gold-coloured cord. A large arm-chair and a comfortable sofa occupied opposite sides of the blazing fire; and the room, which was not large, felt and looked like a place where the maiden mistress of an old home like ours might muse away a good portion of her life. Yet Judith's musings had not been of any enviable sort, and the strong attraction I felt to her was made up of pity for the past, wonder in the present, and, as to the future, of an indefinable fear. We sat brooding over the fire. We scarcely spoke. The clock ticked off the minutes, and told out the hours as they passed away. Judith took my hand, and fondled it sometimes, always looking then into my face with strange speculative eyes, as if she were wondering over how things might have been, and how our relations to each other might have differed. Then I would smile till she smiled again—but we seldom spoke through those hours we stayed together in the friendly warmth till the clock struck four; then she said, "He has seen your father. I think he would go there straight. I think he would rouse them even from their beds."

"I know he would," I answered.

"Then I can rest. It is all out of my hands now," she said.

So I got up and left her; I reached my own room with soft footsteps and went to bed. In the morning—it was Christmas Eve—I went to her again. She was in a deep, heavy sleep. Lady Mackworth stood by her bedside.

"She spoke to me," said Lady Mackworth, holding up a small bottle, labelled "laudanum." "She told me she had had to take this. She has often had to do so lately." I suppose that I looked frightened, for she added, "Under medical advice, my love." Then she went on. "She wishes you to give the dole to-day for her. Do not refuse, dear child. You, as John's wife, will reign here one day."

I interrupted her. "No, Lady Mackworth."

"Well, never mind," she said, impatiently; "I have lost hope."

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"For Judith I will do anything," I said, "only stand by and show me how."

She kissed me, and led me out of the room. We left Judith sleeping.

That day I did all that was required of me, and every soul asked after my father and blessed his memory and his name.

Just as I was going to bed, about eleven o'clock, Judith came to me dressed to go out. "Come," she said, "we can see the lights burning in the church. I will try to pray. I like to watch the Christmas morning in. Will you watch too?"

V.

THE SECRET TOLD: THE SECRET KEPT.

CHRISTMAS morning! In the hour during which we had been away the house had been garnished in the apparel of the day. They must have had all things ready, and have worked hard to put them in their places. Nature's Christmas gifts were bountiful that year at Calverley. The thaw had come at the right time. The holly was no worse for the icicles, and it glittered and glowed in berried beauty over the antlers, and wreathed the helmets hung in the hall. Judith had smiled and pointed to them as we had passed along; and now her room, in which we stood together, was like a gem set in gold. I could not hide my admiration, my surprise.

"Ah," she said, "they do it for me. Every year is fuller of fondness than the last. They exhaust themselves with inventing new devices to make me happy. I could be happy in a moment if *she*—you know whom I mean—if she would confess her sin, and help me to heal the evil. Every year till this I have hoped that it was false. But that poor woman would never have lied upon her dying bed. And now what will your father do, Mary? It is all his, and he can give it to you. I had such a longing to see you. And

I could have loved you once like a mother, you beautiful child—but that drifted away and Lady Mackworth bore it—knowing all, never sunk under the disapppointment; bore it better than I did. I am frightened when I think what a woman she is. And yet I love her. When I am gone, you will try to be a daughter to her, for she has never faltered one moment in her love to me through all these years. When I am gone——"

"Hush, Judith," I cried. "You must not talk. If you have commanded here too long, you must now learn to obey." I spoke with a strength that came to me like a new power, for there was something inexpressibly dreadful in the low dreamy way in which she was dropping out the thoughts of her poor laden heart. "You do not suppose," I said, "that an old woman's persisting in telling a strange story such as this is enough to make it true? We all know that there has been a mystery and a secret about something, and now it will be investigated; and the best thing you can do—indeed the only *decent* thing is for you to hold your tongue."

She looked at me astonished. And when I once more looked round the room, and took in its general aspect of luxury and indulgence, I felt sure that the strongest treatment I could venture upon would be the most beneficial. So I said it all again and again, in different ways; and from different points of view I argued it out with her, strongly and shortly. I told her she was not to talk of *when she was gone*, that it was wrong to say that Lady Mackworth had been guilty of *any* crime; that she had been weak to admit any such idea into her heart, destroying her own peace, and making every one miserable for years; and that now that the trouble was, where all troubles ought to be, *in the hands of men*, she had only to be still and wait—to be strong in the knowledge that she was willing to do right.

It was marvellous to see how Judith rallied under the new treatment to which I was subjecting her. Baines, who slept in a dressing-room, came in to ask if Judith was not going to bed; and Judith said, "I am having a new Christmas

gift, and I think it is going to do me good." So then I bade her good-night and went away. But for myself there was no gift of sleep. I lay awake wondering; and then, though I was dressed, and had been reading by candlelight for an hour, I half screamed with fright when a woman came to light my fire, and put a note into my hand, saying, "The gentleman is down stairs please, ma'am."

It was from my father. "Keep the secret and contrive for me to see Judith, with yourself only as a witness, before nine o'clock, in the library, where I shall be waiting."

I dressed and went to Judith. I found her leaning from the window of her room, and looking across the entrance drive to where the church tower showed among the trees. She was dressed in brown velvet from head to foot, and looked grandly handsome as she turned round, and her profile showed against the bright morning sky, and the masses of her folded hair looked heavy in the shade.

"I want you to show me the library," I said, suddenly.

She smiled. "I showed you my inner heart last night, and you scolded me well. What are you going to do for the library, if I show you that?"

She looked beautifully bright, for the cold breeze had brought the colour to her cheeks, and I thought her attitude, as she stood with a black hat in her hand, was perfect. "I wanted you to walk again to the church with me. How well the bells have sounded! it is a frost once more. Will this Christmas bring peace to me?—I almost think it will."

"Come to the library," I said.

She took me to the cedar parlour, where we had been the night before, now gay with garlands, and fragrant with hot-house flowers, and through the door where I had first seen her strange, sad face; and, passing through a small ante-room hung with heavy drapery to keep away all cold and draughts, we found ourselves immediately in a long room, of which one whole length was hung with pictures, and where double bookcases stretching into the room between each window made deep wide recesses down the other side.

We walked straight to a glowing fire, and then, straight to our side from the recess in front of the fire, walked my father.

Judith visibly trembled. My father took her hand, and holding it, stooped his head and kissed my forehead, for I had got close to his side.

"John's arrival at four yesterday morning took me by surprise," he said. "He gave me your message, and I came off with my Christmas gift. Lady Mackworth is perfectly innocent of the deceit that was played."

"Thank God," said Judith.

"And to my wife," said my father, "I will tell the rest. There is one dearer to me than even Lady Mackworth is to you; and only to my wife will I speak of that beloved one—only to her."

"You cannot wish that now, Roger?" she said. But my father turned to me—

"Get your bonnet on, Mary, and follow us to the church. John is there. Now, say yes to me, Judith."

"Yes," she said.

My father detained me for one moment with his hand on my shoulder. "Only in this way," he said, "can we get rid of the difficulties which in your case, Judith, marriage settlements would produce. Only in this way can we *keep the secret.* Lady Mackworth must never know."

I began dimly to understand my father's meaning. He had armed himself with a special licence. John was waiting at the church. *To keep the secret*—that Lady Mackworth might never know—that all legal difficulties might be avoided—for these things a private immediate marriage with the true possessor of all which had been wrongfully called hers was the only thing to be done.

I felt it all; knew it, without being told; and hurried away, to come back and find Judith and my father waiting on the pathway to the church. We were there in two minutes, and the bells were ringing still. We stood there, before the altar, all decked for Christmas Day; and John

and I witnessed the marriage by which the secret was to be kept from the world around us.

When we were once more in the library my father spoke in, as nearly as I can recollect, these words:

"It was my grandfather who, to save Lady Mackworth's life, replaced her dead child with a living one. You all know the circumstances that so sadly marked the time of her child's birth. He did it through a surgeon, who sent for me on his death-bed, and told me. My grandfather had said to him that he should that day alter his will, and secure the property to me. On his way to do me that justice he was killed. Mr. Ellerby—for the surgeon was the husband of the lady who has kept my house—feared the consequences to himself that might result from making known what he had done, at my grandfather's earnest desire, and purely to save Lady Mackworth, who had almost sunk under the news of her husband's death, and who could not have outlived the second shock of the death of her child. Ellerby died just before you broke off the marriage with Major Grey. We both heard the news about the same time, and Ellerby knew that Dame Margery had told you—so did I. Any moment in which you had confided in me would have been the last moment of difficulty, if you had so willed; but I could never do anything myself. Lady Mackworth used to ask me at Christmas; but least of all could I have done anything against your will, Judith, on Christmas Day."

"Tell the whole," said Judith. "Who am I?"

"You are my wife," he said. "No living soul knows any more."

The bells rang on. The news spread about, "Miss Mackworth was married!" My father took his bride to Lady Mackworth, who was waiting, wonder-struck, in the great hall.

How John had gone to London; how my father, "being high in the law, had managed to get his special licence all in a moment," to use the people's words, and how Miss Mackworth had wedded with her own true love at last, was

a Christmas story for every one to tell, and for every one to listen to. We did not mind how much the people talked; neither did we care what they said. *The secret was kept.*

Lady Mackworth blessed her daughter, and called my father her son; and in the evening he took his bride to London, and left us to feasting, and fireworks, and the most thorough rejoicing that ever surrounded the Christmas gifts of any Christmas Day.

Mrs. Ellerby, who had always been distinguished by a touch of melancholy, arising from never having been able to settle the question of her husband's good or evil deeds towards my father to her satisfaction, was made happy for life by the blessedness of this marriage. She kept the secret well; and when my father and Judith came back to Calverley, that the New Year might be begun among their own people, he cruelly looked at me, and asked where Miss Jackson was?

The world around, which had felt the shock of our Christmas Day so as scarcely for a time to know how to recover from it, forgave the whole thing on learning that Judith had intended to marry my father more than a dozen years before. In a moment everything was accounted for. My father became a county hero. We, who stood within the circle of attraction, were crowned as peace-makers; and when it became known that I was to be married to John from the old home that had become my father's house, the public satisfaction was at its height.

And still, in our little world, among all past Christmases, that one, which is known as, *par excellence*, the Christmas of Calverley Court, stands out as *happy*. Without any of its troubles—with all its gifts to poor and rich, of hand and heart—ladies and gentlemen, *the same to you.*

*THE SECRET OF COUSIN GEOFFREY'S CHAMBER.**

I.

"THERE are Annie and Margaret Ducie—that makes two—and the Ladies Lascelles, five: I don't see how we can squeeze in another young lady, by any possibility!"

Mrs. Pagonel was the speaker; and it was the sixth time that Beatrice and I had heard her say this, always winding up with a piteous appeal to us.

"Girls, what am I to do?"

"Really, mother dear, I don't see what you can do," said Beatrice, "except just write and say the truth, and that we are very sorry and so forth."

"What's the trouble, mother?" asked Hugh Pagonel, appearing in the doorway, ready equipped for his day's shooting.

"Oh! my dear, didn't you hear at breakfast? Those tiresome Mortons—at least they are charming people, I'm sure—only it is inconvenient—they have written to ask if they may bring a young lady, a niece of theirs, to stay here for the New Year's Eve Ball."

"Oh! never mind, mother, pack her in somehow or other, can't you? The more the merrier. Let her take my room, and I could have a shake-down anywhere."

"You are the kindest of boys," his mother said, looking fondly up at his stately height and bright, good-tempered face; "but it would be of no use, my dear, thank you. I could not offer a young lady a room in the bachelors' row,

* The main incident of this story is one which really took place.

up a separate staircase and all: impossible! and it wouldn't do to make room for her by putting a maid there. No, no, I really must write, as Beatrice proposes, only it does so vex your father to seem inhospitable."

"Can't Bee and Katie put up together for those two nights?"

"Katie is to be badly enough quartered as it is," said Mrs. Pagonel, smiling at me; "we mean to put her into that little oak cupboard, which really is too small to turn round in, and Bee will give up her room to the Miss Ducies, and sleep in my dressing closet. It is wonderful how little accommodation there is in this great rambling place."

"Well, I can only see one thing to be done, mother," said Hugh; "give Miss What's-her-name the choice of staying away, or sleeping in Cousin Geoffrey's chamber."

"Really, mamma, we never thought of that," said Beatrice; "it is never used as a sitting-room—why not put a bed there for once? You don't really believe that it is haunted, do you?"

"Not exactly, but such a dreary room, and on the ground floor away from everybody. I could hardly put a guest there."

"No, mamma, I never thought of your putting a guest there; but why should not Miss Morton sleep in your dressing closet? She must put up with close quarters—and I will have the little stretcher bed put into Cousin Geoffrey's room."

"My dear child, I would not on any account risk your nerves meeting with any shock."

"My nerves are in no danger, mother, I assure you," said Beatrice, in her quiet rather demure manner. "I don't believe in ghosts."

"That is no reason why you should not be afraid of them," I remarked; "you had much better let me sleep in the haunted room. I do believe in ghosts, you know, and I should not at all mind seeing one: it would be great fun."

"I think we have used you ill enough already, Katie,"

said Mrs. Pagonel; "we don't treat you much like a visitor," and, with her sweet smile, she held out to me a hand, which, with its delicacy and look of exquisite keeping, its soft palm and nervous fluttering fingers, always seemed to me so like herself, and her whole character. I had by no means lost my childish pleasure in admiring it, and in fingering her many bright rings, and I took it into both my own hands as I answered her last speech.

"Indeed, I should hope not! No place ever seems half so like home as dear old Ernscliff."

"We'll settle it as I proposed, please, mamma," Beatrice said, with the sober, well-judged decisiveness which she usually brought to the rescue in her mother's many small worries and uncertainties. "I will take all the trouble if you will let me, and I will go at once and desire Mrs. White to see that the room is well aired before the 31st."

And, after making an orderly arrangement of her work, she left the room.

"I'm off too now, mother," said Hugh, who had waited good-naturedly to see if he could be of any use. "Bee is a capital girl, isn't she? she always hits on the right thing; and if she should see the ghost, I hope she'll ask him where the treasure is; for, by Jove, it's wanted!"

He left the room; and his words, light as they were, called up a deep sigh from his mother, of which I partly knew the cause, for I was too much like a child of the house not to be aware that there were money embarrassments at Ernscliff Castle, which weighed heavily upon them all. The dear old squire, the kindest, but not the wisest of men, had been led into foolish speculations, which had resulted in severe losses. To meet these demands he had been obliged to effect a heavy mortgage on his estate; and the loss of income which this involved could not fail of being a serious annoyance and difficulty to a family like the Pagonels—warm-hearted, open-handed people, with a considerable position in the county to keep up, with the endless expenses belonging to a large estate, and with numerous traditions of

hospitality and charity, to break through, any of which would have broken Squire Pagonel's heart as well. I knew that Mrs. Pagonel had been anxious that the New Year's gathering of county neighbours, which was one of the institutions of Ernscliff Castle, should not take place this year; but her husband could not bear to give it up, especially as Hugh, whose birthday fell on the last day of the year, was to come of age, and his father had long determined that this event should be celebrated by a ball.

"Let us economise in some other way," he had said, as his custom was, and as his wife knew that he would say again when she should demur to a month in London, or a trip to Scotland, or any other pet scheme which involved the spending of money. So, with a little sigh, she had resigned herself, only trying feebly to introduce little economical amendments into the arrangements, to which, of course, the old servants opposed all their *vis inertiæ*, and which would never have been carried through, but for Beatrice's marvellous gift of managing everything and everybody. She had, as usual, been head in all the plans, and I had tried to be hands and feet; for, as I have already said, I was like another daughter of the house, though our relationship—for we did "call cousins"—was of the vaguest and most distant kind. My father, General Seaton, and Mr. Pagonel of Ernscliff, had been schoolfellows and brother officers; and their friendship had been cemented by the marriage of both, within a few years of each other, with two girls, distant relations, who had been brought up together.

My father and mother had been for the last ten years in India, and I had been left under the care of an excellent kind-hearted lady who took a small number of pupils, and under whose roof I had led a healthy and satisfactory life enough; but Ernscliff, where I spent all my holidays, was the home of my heart; and it made me sad to think that this was probably my last visit there for many years, as I was to join my father and mother in India in a few months' time. It was a place to attach any child, and especially an

imaginative one like myself, used to the monotonous confinement of a London square. The park was wild in the extreme, a wide stretch of wood and hill and moorland, and the castle was a heavy dark-red mass of building, standing at the very edge of a steep descent, at the foot of which nestled the quaint little old-fashioned village, so directly below, that a stone could easily have been thrown from one of the castle windows down straight into the market place. Inside it was a queer rambling house, full of narrow passages, and large long vaulted rooms, and unexpected staircases round dangerous corners, leading to haunted-looking attics and ranges of dungeon-like cellars; charming for hide and seek, as we had often found, Hugh and Beatrice and I. The entrance-hall was of dark oak, with a stone floor, and with two heavy arched doors leading from it to the dining-room and library and a third, rarely opened, which belonged to the room I have mentioned before—the blue chamber of the house—the haunted apartment known as Cousin Geoffrey's room. A gloomy, grewsome place it certainly was, partly because it had never, for generations, been made use of, so that it had gradually become a sort of hospital for disabled furniture and a receptacle for lumber. It took its share in the quarterly sweepings and scrubbings; but at other times I do not think the housemaids frequented it much; and, though I never heard any well-authenticated story of ghostly sights or sounds being seen or heard there, there was a vague horror of the place, which, as well as its quaint name, had been handed down from generation to generation among the traditions of Ernscliff Castle.

When Hugh had gone out shooting, and Mrs. Pagonel had settled herself to her note-writing, I fell to musing on all I had ever heard of this room, and I was surprised to find how very little it was. The subject had hardly ever been mentioned before us in our nursery days; and I knew that Mrs. Pagonel, who believed every one's nerves to be as delicately irritable as her own, would not encourage its discussion now; but I resolved, on the next opportunity, to

ask Beatrice or Hugh to tell me who was this dead and gone Cousin Geoffrey, who was supposed to haunt the chamber to which he had given his name.

The opportunity soon came. Dinner-hours in those days were earlier than they are now, and the blessed institution of five o'clock tea did not yet exist; but Beatrice was in advance of her age in this respect, and she had infected me with her propensity for tea-drinking at irregular hours. It had become a practice with her and me to find ourselves, in the dusk of the winter afternoons, on the large rug of furs which was spread before the wide old-fashioned hearth in the entrance-hall: there, crouching in the corners, out of the blaze and into the warmth, we used to sit and chat, and drink tea, which we waylaid on its road from the kitchen to the housekeeper's room; and there Hugh would often join us, glad to sit and rest before dressing-time, though his mud-coated gaiters and damp shooting-jacket were not presentable in the civilised drawing-room regions. Those hours were some of the most delightful in my many happy days at Ernscliff; it was so easy to talk, so charming to listen, while the red firelight through weird glares and ghostly shadows across the dark hall, and while a cheerful accompaniment was kept up by the crackling logs and the click of Beatrice's never-idle knitting needles.

On this evening we assembled rather earlier than usual, with aching arms and sore fingers, after a busy afternoon spent in dressing the castle with holly, in honour of the approaching Christmas.

As we drew round the fire, Hugh, who had good-naturedly come in early in order to help us in our task, asked his sister if her arrangement held good for New Year's Eve.

"Yes," she answered, smiling; "the mother was rather afraid about the ghost; but it is the best plan, and I am quite willing to take the risk."

"I wish I knew the real story about that room," said I; "it was always tabooed in the nursery, and I have only heard bits and scraps of it; tell it me, Bee, won't you?"

"I would with pleasure, but I really do not know it," said Beatrice, demurely. "*I* don't take much interest in ghost stories."

"I can't make out that there is any ghost in the case," said Hugh; "but the other day, when I had to look up a lot of musty old family papers, I read the whole history of the man who used to live in that room. He didn't begin life as a ghost, you know."

"Oh! then, do tell it nicely, and make a story of it," I said, cowering closer into my corner, in expectation of something delightfully horrible.

"Well, it dates back to the days of Queen Bess. The Pagonels of that time—not our branch of the family, you know—had the ill-luck to be Papists, and, after being rather in favour as long as Mary reigned, they found themselves quite in a wrong box after her sister came to the throne. The family consisted of two brothers, Ralph, the possessor of Ernscliff, and Geoffrey, the younger, who, I believe, had hung about the house contentedly enough, doing everything that nobody else chose to do, as younger brothers did in those days, till there was some trouble between them about a certain beautiful cousin, one Beatrix Pagonel, who had been brought up with them both, and whom they both fell in love with."

"Which did she like best?"

"She liked the eldest brother best, like a well brought-up young woman. In this instance I don't much wonder, for, judging by their portraits, Ralph had the best of it. That is his picture over there; it is too dark to see it now, but you remember what a fine, handsome face it is."

"I would not praise it, if I were you," said Beatrice, smiling, "for it is the image of yourself."

"I'm glad I'm so good-looking. I only hope I shan't live to be hanged like my ancestor."

"Hanged? What had he done?"

"You shall hear. The Pagonels stuck to their faith when times changed, the only alteration being that their

old chaplain disappeared for a little while, and then re-appeared in the character of secretary and house-steward—a very transparent deceit I should think, but I dare say nobody wished to get the family into trouble. Now the story goes that somewhere in the intricacies of the castle there was a hiding-hole, so remote and so skilfully concealed that it defied discovery; the secret of which used to be in the possession of the head of the family, and of one confidant only chosen by himself. It is said that even the political or religious fugitives who had sometimes taken shelter there had been led to and from it blindfold, such was the jealousy with which the Pagonels guarded their precious secret. In Ralph Pagonel's day he had chosen for his confidant his brother Geoffrey; and, trusting to this place of refuge, where the old priest and all his pious belongings could be stowed away at a moment's notice, they practised their religion more fearlessly than most folks of their persuasion in the glorious days of good Queen Bess. At last, a few years after Ralph's marriage, the coolness between him and Geoffrey seems to have ended in an open rupture. Ralph Pagonel turned Geoffrey out of doors, with high words, which I have no doubt he deserved, and Geoffrey went off, vowing to be revenged on his brother."

"Oh! I know what he is going to do—he gave information."

"When next the little congregation at Ernscliff assembled for prayers, one who was always on the watch on these occasions, came to give notice that the sheriff's officers were in the neighbourhood. When they arrived, everything was prepared to receive them, and Mr. Pagonel and his wife welcomed them politely, trusting to baffle them, as they had done before; but fancy their dismay and their fury, when they saw Geoffrey appear, bringing with him the poor old priest and all the sacred vessels which had been hidden in the hiding-hole of which he only knew the secret!"

"Wretched man! no wonder he can't rest in his grave."

"I don't know that he ever had a grave."

"Is he still living then, like the Wandering Jew? I hope he won't come back some day and claim the estate, Hugh."

"Wait till you hear the end. How far all these ins and outs are true I can't tell, but it is certain that Ralph and Beatrix Pagonel, and Francis Rivers, priest, are among those who died on the scaffold, and that Geoffrey was permitted to take possession of the estate 'in consideration of good service rendered to the Crown.' He seems to have led a most miserable life here, shunned by everybody as a traitor and a fratricide, and to have shut himself up at last quite alone in the castle, in that dreary room, having driven even his servants away."

"I don't feel as if I could pity him."

"He was supposed to have become a great miser, for he squeezed all he could out of his tenants; and it was believed that vast sums were accumulated in the castle while he lived here; but when our branch of the family took possession they found not a coin in the house and no signs of wealth—not even a trace of the family plate or jewels, which had been extremely valuable."

"When did your people come into the estate?"

"When this wretched man disappeared mysteriously, which he did at last. There is no record among the papers of the exact way in which his absence was first discovered; probably from his queer hermit way of life, not for a long time; but after some months had elapsed his cousin, our ancestor, came and took possession."

"Where can the hiding-hole be?" I asked.

"To tell you the truth, I don't believe it ever existed. There are no end of closets and corners in all parts of the house, as you know, where a person who knew the place well could play at hide and seek very cleverly with a stranger; I fancy that is the origin of the story."

"And has any one ever seen this horrible Cousin Geoffrey?"

"I never heard of his being seen, but I have no doubt the horror which was felt for him caused his room to be shut

up; and that of course would lead to all kinds of stories; and then there was a great belief that he had left a treasure buried somewhere, and might appear in approved ghost fashion to show its wherabouts."

"O Bee, what a chance for you!"

Beatrice laughed, and said she was in no way desirous of an interview with her unpleasant ancestor, though she added with a sigh:

"Anything short of that I would go through for the chance of finding the treasure."

"Ah! and wouldn't I?" said Hugh. "I can't bear to see the dear old squire look so careworn. I'd do anything to put things square for him."

"Not *anything*, Hugh?" His sister said, with emphasis; and I saw in the firelight how the colour mounted to his forehead as he answered:

"What do you mean? Why do you say that?"

"Because I know there are some things which you would not do for any one," she answered. "Did you hear mamma say that Miss Barnett is coming to the ball with the Lascelles?"

I didn't know why the name of the great Blankshire heiress struck unpleasantly on my ear, but it certainly did, and Hugh's free, gay laugh had never been so welcome.

"Oh! no, hang it," he answered; "we are not quite come to that: I'd sooner have—

"My hollow tree,
My crust of bread and liberty."

There was a pause, and his tone was quite grave and sad, when he said, a moment after:

"But at all events, I'll never do anything to add to his cares—God helping me."

Nobody spoke, and we all sat and looked at the fire, and I felt—I don't know how. Hugh Pagonel had always been very dear to me; all, and more than all that our close intimacy warranted—brother, companion, champion; but I

had never thought of him in any other light; and when, with the shy consciousness of my seventeen years, had come the feeling that our friendship could not be as close and free as that of myself and Beatrice, I had been more irritated and chafed than confused by the conviction. But the idea which Beatrice had suggested was strangely distasteful to me; it made me realise how dreary it would be to see Hugh married to another woman; and I found myself recollecting with a pang that my father had no fortune independent of his profession, and that for Hugh to marry a penniless wife would be to take the surest way of adding to the squire's embarrassments. As I raised my eyes I met Hugh's fixed upon me with a look as sad and earnest as my own could have been. For the first time, his gaze confused me, and it was a relief when the sound of the great clanging house-bell scattered us in our different directions to dress for dinner.

II.

On New Year's Eve the guests assembled for the coming-of-age ball that night, and to stay over the next day, when a tenants' supper was to take place. There is no need to describe them; they were pleasant, good-natured people, most of them old friends and neighbours of the Pagonels; and, as I had met them, year after year, during my holiday visits at Ernscliff, they were all kind in their notice of me, and civil in their regrets at hearing that this was my last stay there before leaving England. The only stranger, besides the Miss Morton whose coming had caused so much discussion, was Miss Barnett, the heiress, who came with the Lord Lieutenant's party from Lascelles Acres. I could not help looking at her with much interest, and I am afraid I felt an uncharitable vexation at finding her to be a remarkably sweet-looking girl, very young, and simple in appearance and manner, and so unaffectedly delighted with the grand old castle, and the wide expanse of park through

which they had driven, that I could almost have accused her, spitefully, of wishing to win Hugh's heart by praising the home which he loved so dearly. With my childish notion of what an heiress must be like, I was rather surprised to see her dressed in a sober, dark-coloured linsey, and coarse straw bonnet of the plainest kind; but, when we all went to dress after dinner, I heard Lady Lascelles telling Mrs. Pagonel that she had persuaded "Isabella to bring her jewels, as she thought they really were worth seeing;" and accordingly she entered the great drawing-room where we were to dance blazing with diamonds, which gleamed from the bosom of her white lace dress, and shone like stars in her thick plaits of light brown hair. She blushed a little when they were admired by all who felt intimate enough to speak of them to her, and anxiously explained that Lady Lascelles had made her wear them, as if she dreaded being supposed to have herself wished to make the display; and again I felt unreasonably annoyed—angered at the pretty diffident manner which formed such a piquant contrast to her gorgeous ornaments, and cruelly mortified when a glance at the mirror showed me my tall figure in a dress of the simplest muslin (manufactured by my own fingers under the superintendence of Mrs. Pagonel's maid), and my dark hair with a simple wreath of holly laid across it. The consciousness that my face was wreathed into a peculiarly crabbed and unlovely form warned me to recover my temper, and try to acquire something less unlike the sweet looks of the heiress; and I turned away from the mirror and endeavoured to throw myself into the interest of the moment. The ball began and went on with great spirit: I had plenty of partners, and should have enjoyed myself thoroughly, if it had not been that Hugh did not once dance with me—a state of things unprecedented at any of the Ernscliff festivities since I was seven years old. Last year I should have taken him to task for his neglect as fearlessly as if he had been my brother; now I could only fret inwardly while I tried to assume an extra gaiety of

manner whenever he was near me, especially if Miss Barnett was his partner.

The result was that I was thoroughly tired before the end of the evening, and heartily glad when I heard the guests who were not staying at Ernscliff order their carriages; and, when the squire insisted that the ball should wind up with Sir Roger de Coverley, I stole away into a small room adjoining the drawing-room, and always known as the "spirit chamber"—not, I believe, from any ghostly association, but simply from the preference of the Pagonel ancestry for having something at hand, Gamp-like, to which they "could put their lips when so disposed." It was fitted up as a little boudoir, and there I found Beatrice alone, looking so blue and cold, that I exclaimed at the sight—

"What have you been doing to yourself, Bee? You look like a ghost."

"Don't talk about ghosts!" she said, with a little shiver; "I am so ashamed of myself, Katie! I have a regular fit of *nerves* upon me to-night—so unlike me!"

"Are you not well, dear Bee?"

"Quite; but it is so foolish! You know I can't dance long without getting a pain in my side, and it is the same with Margaret Ducie; so we came in here to rest, and then our partners would come with us; and somehow they began asking about the family pictures in the hall, and that led to talking about Cousin Geoffrey's room, and they made me tell the story."

"And you frightened yourself? Oh! Bee, what a triumph! I thought you were much too wise to care for ghosts or goblins."

"That didn't frighten me; but then Margaret told us their horrible Ducie ghost-story, and Captain Lascelles capped it with something worse. You know I always dislike that sort of ghost talk, which seems to me such waste of time and trial of nerves for nothing; but I could not stop it, and none of them knew that I was to sleep in that dreary, lonely room to-night."

"And you shan't sleep there," I cried; "you shall have my room, Bee, darling. I shan't mind sleeping downstairs in the least."

"No; I'm not quite so selfish as that," she said. "I shall be all right when I get to bed and to sleep; I can't think why I have such a silly fit; it is very unlike me, I flatter myself—very odd."

"Not odd at all, my dear, when you consider that you were up at five this morning dressing the supper-table, and have been hard at work ever since. You may have prodigious strength of mind, but in body you are not a Hercules; and nerves belong to the body, don't they?"

The dance was over, the guests departing; and we had to emerge from our retreat. At the door Hugh was standing, leaning against the wall, and looking gloomy enough, but gazing fixedly across the room. Following his eyes I saw, with a thrill of pain, that they were riveted on Miss Barnett, who was looking peculiarly soft and attractive as she stood listening to Captain Lascelles, the light flashing from her splendid jewels.

"Do you admire her, Hugh?" I heard Beatrice whisper.

"I admire her jewels," he answered; "but her hair is hardly dark enough to set them off. Wouldn't they look well in black hair? I certainly do like diamonds."

"Most people do," his sister said, smiling.

"I wish I thought that I should ever be able to dress up my wife in such jewels as those," he answered.

"Well," she glanced with her demure gravity at his face, "you know the way, Hugh; faint heart never won fair lady."

"Ah! but the jewels must be of my giving, or I shouldn't value them a rush," he said; and as he moved off to hand some lady to her carriage, I felt my heart wonderfully lightened, and was ready to respond cordially when Beatrice began to sing Miss Barnett's praises.

It was sometime before the various guests were shown to their rooms; but as soon as they had disappeared in their

different directions I drew Beatrice into the little closet where I was to sleep. She was looking white and over-tired; and though well aware that it was not easy to persuade her to relinquish a plan, I was determined that she should not pass the night in that dreary room downstairs.

"Beatrice," I began, trying to be very authoritative, "I am going to help you out of your dress, and wrap you up in my dressing-gown, and then I shall carry my goods downstairs and bring yours up. I am quite determined to change places with you to-night."

"You shall do nothing of the kind, Katie: I am quite ashamed of myself as it is, but you can't suppose I'm quite so selfish!"

"Selfish? but really and truly I should enjoy the fun. You know I like an adventure, and here is the chance of one for me; and I am not feeling in the least nervous to-night."

"I wouldn't on any account. Couldn't we both squeeze in here for this short part of a night?"

And she glanced at the tiny bed which had been with difficulty wedged in from wall to wall of the little cell. I laughed at the idea, but was charmed to see this sign of wavering; and by a few more vehement words I carried my point, for indeed Beatrice was over-tired and unhinged, and had not the strength to oppose me. In one thing, however, she was unpersuadable: she insisted on helping me to carry down my garments, and on seeing me safely installed in my apartment. This I allowed her to do, knowing that the servants were still about, and that therefore her night journey through the gloomy house would not be as eerie as it sounded.

The door of Cousin Geoffrey's room gave a dismal creak as it swung back on its rusty hinges, and the candle which each of us carried only made the great cavern of darkness look more impenetrable. Truly it was a dreary room, even apart from the memories of sin, and remorse, and lonely wretchedness which seemed to hang heavily about it. Like

most rooms in Ernscliff Castle, it was panelled with oak: the window recesses were of such depth as to form small rooms, testifying to the immense thickness of the walls, and were only half concealed by the scanty curtains, so fusty and ragged that I think they must have come down from the days of Cousin Geoffrey himself. There was a dreary array of dilapidated chairs, broken tables, and odds and ends of furniture banished for their ugliness from the more civilised parts of the house, and a space had been cleared in the middle for the light stretcher—a reminiscence of the squire's campaigning days—for a hastily-arranged dressing-table and a sponging-bath—the latter an essentially every-day, nineteenth-century affair, which was quite a cheering sight amidst so much dilapidation and decay. The housemaid had forgotten, or had been afraid to visit the room since dark, and the logs on the hearth had smouldered themselves away. This was the first thing which struck Beatrice, and with a shiver she exclaimed—

"Oh, dear, they have let the fire out! how excessively dreary!"

"Never mind," I cried, "it is all *en règle;* much more ghostified than if it were warm and light, like any commonplace room. Now, Bee, make haste to bed. Here, bundle all these things over your arm—good-night."

"I can't bear to leave you," she said, lingering; but my spirit was now thoroughly made up to the adventure, and I would not hear of giving it up. I laughed at all Beatrice's demurs and scruples, told her that she would be a ghost herself if she stayed any longer shivering in the cold; and finally dismissed her, saying, as I gave her a last kiss, and saw her wistful, troubled look at me: "My dear, you needn't make yourself unhappy! you know I don't possess nerves—I never was afraid of anything in my life."

Foolish, boastful words, which I had often said before, but which I was never to say again!

III.

As the last sound of Beatrice's receding footsteps died away, I did feel rather lonely and queer; but rallying my spirits, and telling myself that it was "capital fun," as Hugh would have said, I began bustling about and preparing for bed, without leaving myself time to get nervous. I was soon out of my ball-dress, and in my warm dressing-gown and fur-lined slippers, which felt very comfortable in that cold, cellar-like atmosphere. The unplaiting of my hair was a longer business, and I could not help falling into a reverie as I sate opposite the glass, and forgetting cold and fright and all things in speculating as to whether Hugh would, after all, repair the family fortunes by marrying Miss Barnett. With an ingenuity in self-torture which never, I think, exists in perfection except at seventeen, I built a series of most gloomy castles in the air—saw Hugh married to the heiress; Beatrice settled far from Ernscliff, and the dear old place closed against me for ever; and then I indulged in a hearty fit of the dismals over my own future—in a strange country, and with parents who were little more to me than a vague memory and a name. I sate mournfully gazing into the depths of the looking-glass, when I suddenly found that a pair of gloomy painted eyes, from the wall behind, were looking back at me with the earnest, solemn gaze which always lives in the fixed eyes of a picture. I hastily turned and looked at the portrait, which I had not noticed before, but on which the rays of my candle happened now to fall. It represented a young man, not uncouth to look upon, though there was a peering, near-sighted contraction about the eyes, and a sort of suppressed sneer on the mouth, which gave an unpleasant expression to the otherwise handsome features. No doubt this was the wretched Geoffrey Pagonel: whose portrait but his would have been thus banished from the hall, where all

the others hung in honoured remembrance? The haunting eyes of the picture made me shiver. I could hardly help gazing at it, fascinated, and felt as if in another moment the painted lips would begin to move, and the painted finger be raised to point out the buried treasure. Oh, it was very well to laugh and joke about the ghost in the cheerful rooms upstairs; but it was very different in this gloomy, darkened chamber, and with those spectral eyes glaring at me from the walls. A sensation as if cold water were running down the back of my neck suddenly warned me that I was getting overpoweringly nervous: there was nothing for it but to hurry over my preparations, and plunge into the safe harbour of my bed, where I could draw the clothes over eyes and ears, and try to sleep away the haunted hours till daylight. With a sudden resolution I sprang up, and in doing so struck the candlestick with my elbow; it fell with a crash to the ground, the light being of course extinguished in the fall, and myself left in total darkness!

That was a horrible moment; and yet there was something ludicrous in the adventure which gave me courage; and I instantly remembered that the fire in the hall had been burning cheerily a few minutes before, and, moreover, that a box of lucifer-matches and a pair of unlighted candles were always to be found on the mantelpiece there. To finish undressing in the dark, *tête-à-tête* with that dreadful picture, was not to be thought of; and, though not very sure of my bearings, I began to grope my way in the direction where I believed the door to be, stretching out my hand before me in hopes of finding the handle. Suddenly my foot caught, probably in a hole in the ragged carpet; I fell forward and was saved by the wall, or rather the door, for it yielded as I fell against it, and as I stumbled forward I heard it close with a sharp click behind me. I must be in the hall, of course; but why was it in such total darkness? Could that blazing fire have gone out entirely in so very short a time? And even if it had, was there no glimmer from the staircase-window, which I knew had no shutters?—and why

was there such a strange, close smell, as if there was hardly any fresh air in the place? I stood for a moment bewildered; then I determined to grope my way along the wall, where I must come in time to the table, which stood only a few paces to the right of the door leading into Cousin Geoffrey's room. I groped on—on—on—till I was suddenly brought up by another wall, at right angles: turning the corner, I groped on there, and this time I was stopped by stumbling against what seemed to be a chest or box, about as high as my waist. I still felt my way on, and there seemed to be other chests, sacks, boxes. Oh! where was I? Was there any cupboard in the room, into which I had unwittingly strayed? No; I was sure that there was none. Again and again I felt high and low for a door-handle; but the wooden walls were hopelessly smooth; there was no trace of the door by which I had entered, though I felt sure that I must have groped more than once quite round my prison. It appeared to be a small room; long, but very narrow; raising my hand above my head, I could feel no roof. Bewildered, scared, I believe—for I really hardly know—that I began to scream, the conviction rushing suddenly over me that my light words had been awfully fulfilled—that I had found the hidden room, the existence of which nobody now believed in; perhaps, too, to judge by the presence of these chests and sacks against the walls, I had found the missing treasure. My voice re-echoed drearily. No help came; no sound, no stir was to be heard. Never—never can I remember without a shudder, the feeling of utter desolation which struck cold on my heart at that moment—the sense of being cut off from all human help; alone, in the cruel, unfriendly darkness, I knew not where! I think I could almost have gone mad; but fortunately the very feeling that my senses were leaving me gave me strength to make one last strong effort to regain composure. First, I heartily commended myself to the protection of God; and then I was able to recollect that, after all, my situation was more ludicrous than terrible. I must be in some unknown

recess in the thickness of the wall—probably the outer wall—and, of course, though it might be a work of time to discover the spring which I must have unwittingly pressed, it would be easy to effect my deliverance by removing a panel. The housemaid would come to call me at eight or nine o'clock, and all I had to do was to reserve my voice, instead of screaming it away, so that I might make her hear and understand when she should enter the room. With this resolve, I sank down on the ground where I was—somewhere in the middle of the little narrow cell—and stretching out my hand, I felt along one of the chests, if chests they were, to ascertain if it was to be trusted as a support for my back. Oh, heaven! what, what met my hand?—what was hanging down the side of the chest? My cold fingers closed on other fingers; stiff, unyielding fingers; fleshless, bony. Something—I dared not think what—something which had probably been stretched along on the flat top of the chest—yielding to my frightened clutch, fell down close to me—almost over me, with a horrible rattle, which echoed drearily. Terror, sickening terror, overwhelmed me, and for the first time in my life I must have become entirely insensible; for I remember recovering by slow degrees the consciousness of where I was. When it all came back to me, my first impulse was to crouch up and draw my dress close round me, lest it should touch that horrible, nameless thing. And then a fresh dread came over me. How long had my swoon lasted? Was it not very likely that the housemaid had come and gone while I was insensible and incapable of making her hear? If so, might not days, nay, weeks elapse before any one entered the fatal room? There was something too fearful in the idea that they might be searching for me everywhere, wondering at my disappearance, while I should be starving, dying, suffering all the agonies of a lingering torture, close to them. I thought of the poor bride in the old ballad of the "Mistletoe Bough;" and the tears which I could not shed over my own situation began to flow freely at the recol-

lection of a horror which was long over and past, if indeed it ever existed in real life. On, on, on crept the lingering hours, and I could not at last help feeling sure that my worst fears must be realised. Day must surely be come, though there was no day for me in my narrow tomb. It seemed as if the ball had happened ages ago; as if I must have been many, many hours shut up here. The intense cold which I felt, the thirst which burned my throat, the sinking weakness in all my limbs, strengthened this conviction. Were these the first beginnings of the slow agony which was to end in death?

The horror of this thought swept away all self-control, and I broke out into a frantic cry—

"Will no one help me?—will no one hear me? Oh! I can't—I can't die here!—die like this!" and I shrieked violently.

Oh! joy of joys! I was answered. Yes, there was a voice—a loud, strong voice, though it sounded strangely muffled, and yet not very far off.

"What is it? What the deuce has happened? What is the matter?"

"Oh! is it Hugh? I am here, Hugh—I—Katie—oh! do let me out."

"Katie? Where on earth are you? Your voice seems to come out of the wall."

"Yes I am, I am in the wall; I do believe it is the hiding-hole, and oh! I don't know what there is here—such horrors! Can't you take me out, Hugh? dear, dear Hugh."

"Of course; but how the deuce did you ever get in?"

"From that dreadful room—Cousin Geoffrey's room. I was sleeping there instead of Bee."

"Oh! then I had better go round to that room." And his voice receded, leaving me greatly bewildered as to his present whereabouts. Just as the dreadful sense of loneliness began to creep over me again, I heard the joyous sound of tramping feet and opening doors—and then his dear, cheery voice, always welcome—how welcome now!—sounded

from the opposite side and much more clearly. "Speak, Katie, I can't tell the least where you are."

"Oh! here, here! Oh! you won't leave me again, Hugh! I fell: I must have touched a spring. Where am I?"

"How uncommonly queer! My poor Katie! You are in the thickness of the outer wall, I fancy. Well! this is a funny state of things!"

In a minute he said, in a calm, serious voice, which went a long way towards quieting my nerves—

"Katie, I must leave you for a few minutes. I might fumble here for ever before I touched the spring, as no doubt you happened to do. The best way will be to take out a panel, and for that I must get Adams and his tools. Luckily he has been sleeping here, because of all the ball carpentry. I shan't be away long, but probably he is not up, so it may take some minutes; ten perhaps."

"Not up? What can the time be?"

"Just half-past six by the watch."

"Not six in the morning? Oh! I thought I had been here for ages. I thought I must have missed the housemaid when she came to call me. Hugh—you're not gone, are you?"

"Not gone, but going."

"But don't, don't!" I cried; "if you are only away five minutes, I know it will seem an hour, and I can't bear it—I can't indeed;" and, ashamed as I was of my childishness, I could not prevent my voice from dying away in a burst of sobs and tears. Hugh's answer came back in fond, caressing tones, such as I had never heard from him before:

"My poor little darling Katie," he said, "you have had a cruel shock. We shall never forgive ourselves for what we have exposed you to. But you must be reasonable, dearest Katie, and trust me that I won't be one minute longer than I can help. I'm going now, my Katie—don't be afraid. You will be all right and safe in a very few minutes now."

I heard his footsteps die away; but before I had time to become thoroughly nervous again I heard other feet and

other voices gathering in the room, and speaking to me in tones of pity and consternation, but of amusement too, which did me great good: for in my feelings of horror and dismay, I had lost sight of the absurd side to my adventure. Beatrice was there, and I heard the squire's good-tempered voice, and his wife's gentle tones: and then came back again the voice that I liked best of all, and soon I was aware that Adams was busy at the panel, and at last—oh, blessed moment!—I saw the light of their candles, and the familiar figures in all sorts of quaint deshabilles. I felt myself drawn out through the narrow aperture and upheld by Hugh's strong supporting arms, and, overwhelmed by the sudden sense of relief and safety, I let my head fall helplessly upon his shoulder, and I remember no more.

In a few moments I was conscious again, and found myself laid on the bed, Mrs. Pagonel and Beatrice attending on me, while the squire and Hugh seemed to be intent on examining the contents of the mysterious cell which I had so strangely been the means of discovering. I heard exclamations of wonder and satisfaction, and then of dismay—and then Mrs. Pagonel interposed, and said that I must at once be taken to some warmer and more cheerful room. The squire accordingly came forward to give me the support of his arm, but not before I had seen a look of sick horror on his broad, ruddy face, and heard him mutter to Hugh, "Horrible! Is it not well written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord?'"

All that day I was thoroughly upset; suffering from headache to such a degree that I could do nothing but lie still and endure. Towards evening, however, I fell into a deep sleep, from which I awoke to find myself out of pain; and drawing aside the bed curtains—I was in Mrs. Pagonel's room—I was well pleased to see Beatrice sitting by the fire, presiding over a most tempting-looking tea equipage.

"Oh! Katie, I am so sorry," were her first words.

"There is nothing to be sorry for, Bee; it is all over, and I am quite well now," I said, rising, and proceeding to twist

up my hair and arrange my dress, and then seating myself in the arm-chair which she was drawing close to the fire for me; "but do tell me; have I really found the hiding-hole?"

"That you have," answered Beatrice, handing me a cup of tea, which I enjoyed as never tea was enjoyed before; "the hiding-hole, and the treasure as well! Such hoards, Katie! chests and sacks full of coins, and all the jewels and plate of which we have the lists among our family papers, but which have always been missing, you know. O Katie, how can we thank you? This will put an end to papa's anxieties, I do believe!"

"Thank heaven! Oh! that is worth all I went through. But, Bee, how came those treasures there, do you suppose? What can have become of the wretched man? I can't tell you what horrible fancies I had about him."

"Are you sure they were fancies?" said Beatrice, very low: then, as I looked questioningly at her, she said with a shudder—

"Yes, my poor dear Katie; he must have really met with the fate which you were afraid of—how it happened, of course, no one can say—and after all, we may be jumping to a wrong conclusion; but a skeleton they have found there: surely it must be his—he must have starved to death in the midst of all the wealth he had hoarded."

"Yes, and sold his soul for! Poor wretched man!" I answered with a shiver: the whole subject was to me too painful for discussion, and when Bee added that one could hardly pity such a wicked man, I could not echo her words; the horror was only a vague, unreal-seeming romance to her, seen through the mists of so many hundred years, but to me it was a frightful reality—a thing of to-day.

I was not well enough to take part in the tenants' supper; but I came down into the little "spirit chamber," and there the guests visited me, one or two at a time. My last visitor was Hugh, who, as soon as he was released from his arduous task of proposing and responding to toasts, and keeping order among his tenants, came to ask how I was,

"You look dreadfully white, Katie," he said, sitting down near me; "not at all the better for your night in Cousin Geoffrey's room! How lucky it was that I could not sleep after the ball, and thought at last I'd go out before light, and try to get a shot at a wild duck!"

"Oh! that was how it was?"

"Yes: from my hearing your voice so plainly outside the house, I fancy there must be a shaft somewhere leading to the outer air—but we'll turn the place regularly out to-morrow. Poor Cousin Geoffrey! he's done us a good turn after all, hasn't he? and those bones of his shall have Christian burial at last."

I could not talk about this part of the subject; Hugh saw it, and went on quickly.

"And do you know that you've discovered a perfect mine of wealth for us? My father says a great portion must go in charity before he can feel sure that it won't bring a curse with it: but even so, there'll be enough bullion to pay off this mortgage which has been worrying his life out."

"I am so glad!"

"Ah! and what am I? I wonder if you have the least idea how wretched I have been these last few days."

I felt that, weak and shaken as I was, I could not answer without beginning to cry, and in a moment Hugh went on:

"To-morrow, Katie, will you let me show you all the quaint old plate and the jewels? Such jewels! Miss Barnett may hide her diminished head for ever. But one of them I must show you now—I can't wait till to-morrow."

He took my hand, and held over the third finger a diamond hoop, heavy and old-fashioned in setting, but the stones of great size and brilliancy.

"Katie, dearest, we have been looking out these jewels in the lists which we have: shall I tell you the name by which this is described there? The troth plight, the betrothal ring: it has been handed down as such evidently from one generation of us Pagonels to another. Katie, don't you and

I belong naturally to each other? Won't you promise me not to go to India? May I not put the ring upon your finger?"

And so it was that Hugh was enabled to carry out his wish of decking his wife in jewels surpassing the Barnett diamonds, and this was what came of my terrible New Year's Eve in Cousin Geoffrey's Chamber.

THE SECRET OF GORESTHORPE GRANGE.

I AM sure that Nature never intended me to be a self-made man. There are times when I can hardly bring myself to realise that twenty years of my life were spent behind the counter of a grocer's shop in the East End of London, and that it was through such an avenue that I reached a wealthy independence and the possession of Goresthorpe Grange. My habits are Conservative, and my tastes refined and aristocratic. I have a soul which spurns the vulgar herd. Our family, the D'Odds, date back to a prehistoric era, as is to be inferred from the fact that their advent into British history is not commented on by any trustworthy historian. Some instinct tells me that the blood of a Crusader runs in my veins. Even now, after the lapse of so many years, such exclamations as "By'r Lady!" rise naturally to my lips, and I feel that, should circumstances require it, I am capable of rising in my stirrups and dealing an infidel a blow—say with a mace—which would considerably astonish him.

Goresthorpe Grange is a feudal mansion—or so it was termed in the advertisement which originally brought it under my notice. Its right to this adjective had a most remarkable effect upon its price, and the advantages gained may possibly be more sentimental than real. Still, it is soothing to me to know that I have slits in my staircase through which I can discharge arrows: and there is a sense of power in the fact of possessing a complicated apparatus by means of which I am enabled to pour molten lead upon the head of the casual visitor. These things chime in with my peculiar humour, and I do not grudge to pay for them.

I am proud of my battlements and of the circular uncovered sewer which girds me round. I am proud of my portcullis and donjon and keep. There is but one thing wanting to round off the mediævalism of my abode, and to render it symmetrically and completely antique. Gorestlorpe Grange is not provided with a ghost.

Any man with old-fashioned tastes and ideas as to how such establishments should be conducted would have been disappointed at the omission. In my case it was particularly unfortunate. From my childhood I had been an earnest student of the supernatural, and a firm believer in it. I have revelled in ghostly literature until there is hardly a tale bearing upon the subject which I have not perused. I learned the German language for the sole purpose of mastering a book upon demonology. When an infant I have secreted myself in dark rooms in the hope of seeing some of those bogies with which my nurse used to threaten me; and the same feeling is as strong in me now as then. It was a proud moment when I felt that a ghost was one of the luxuries which my money might command.

It is true that there was no mention of an apparition in the advertisement. On reviewing the mildewed walls, however, and the shadowy corridors, I had taken it for granted that there was such a thing on the premises. As the presence of a kennel presupposes that of a dog, so I imagined that it was impossible that such desirable quarters should be untenanted by one or more restless shades. Good heavens, what can the noble family from whom I purchased it have been doing during these hundreds of years! Was there no member of it spirited enough to make away with his sweetheart, or take some other steps calculated to establish a hereditary spectre? Even now I can hardly write with patience upon the subject.

For a long time I hoped against hope. Never did rat squeak behind the wainscot, or rain drip upon the attic-floor, without a wild thrill shooting through me as I thought that at last I had come upon traces of some unquiet soul.

I felt no touch of fear upon these occasions. If it occurred in the night-time, I would send Mrs. D'Odd—who is a strong-minded woman—to investigate the matter while I covered up my head with the bedclothes and indulged in an extasy of expectation. Alas, the result was always the same! The suspicious sound would be traced to some cause so absurdly natural and commonplace that the most fervid imagination could not clothe it with any of the glamour of romance.

I might have reconciled myself to this state of things had it not been for Jorrocks of Havistock Farm. Jorrocks is a coarse, burly, matter-of-fact fellow whom I only happen to know through the accidental circumstance of his fields adjoining my demesne. Yet this man, though utterly devoid of all appreciation of archæological unities, is in possession of a well authenticated and undeniable spectre. Its existence only dates back, I believe, to the reign of the Second George, when a young lady cut her throat upon hearing of the death of her lover at the battle of Dettingen. Still, even that gives the house an air of respectability, especially when coupled with bloodstains upon the floor. Jorrocks is densely unconscious of his good fortune; and his language when he reverts to the apparition is painful to listen to. He little dreams how I covet every one of those moans and nocturnal wails which he describes with unnecessary objurgation. Things are indeed coming to a pretty pass when democratic spectres are allowed to desert the landed proprietors and annul every social distinction by taking refuge in the houses of the great unrecognised.

I have a large amount of perseverance. Nothing else could have raised me into my rightful sphere, considering the uncongenial atmosphere in which I spent the earlier part of my life. I felt now that a ghost must be secured, but how to set about securing one was more than either Mrs. D'Odd or myself was able to determine. My reading taught me that such phenomena are usually the outcome of crime. What crime was to be done, then, and who was to

do it? A wild idea entered my mind that Watkins, the house-steward, might be prevailed upon—for a consideration—to immolate himself or some one else in the interests of the establishment. I put the matter to him in a half jesting manner; but it did not seem to strike him in a favourable light. The other servants sympathised with him in his opinion—at least, I cannot account in any other way for their having left the house in a body the same afternoon.

"My dear," Mrs. D'Odd remarked to me one day after dinner, as I sat moodily sipping a cup of sack—I love the good old names—"my dear, that odious ghost of Jorrocks' has been gibbering again."

"Let it gibber!" I answered recklessly.

Mrs. D'Odds struck a few chords on her virginal and looked thoughtfully into the fire.

"I'll tell you what it is, Argentine," she said at last, using the pet name which we usually substituted for Silas, "we must have a ghost sent down from London."

"How can you be so idiotic, Matilda?" I remarked severely. "Who could get us such a thing?"

"My cousin, Jack Brocket, could," she answered confidently.

Now, this cousin of Matilda's was rather a sore subject between us. He was a rakish clever young fellow, who had tried his hand at many things, but wanted perseverance to succeed at any. He was, at that time, in chambers in London, professing to be a general agent, and really living, to a great extent, upon his wits. Matilda managed so that most of our business should pass through his hands, which certainly saved me a great deal of trouble; but I found that Jack's commission was generally considerably larger than all the other items of the bill put together. It was this fact which made me feel inclined to rebel against any further negotiations with the young gentleman.

"O yes, he could," insisted Mrs. D., seeing the look of disapprobation upon my face. "You remember how well he managed that business about the crest?"

"It was only a resuscitation of the old family coat-of-arms, my dear," I protested.

Matilda smiled in an irritating manner. "There was a resuscitation of the family portraits, too, dear," she remarked. "You must allow that Jack selected them very judiciously."

I thought of the long line of faces which adorned the walls of my banqueting-hall, from the burly Norman robber, through every gradation of casque, plume, and ruff, to the sombre Chesterfieldian individual who appears to have staggered against a pillar in his agony at the return of a maiden MS. which he grips convulsively in his right hand. I was fain to confess that in that instance he had done his work well, and that it was only fair to give him an order—with the usual commission—for a family spectre, should such a thing be attainable.

It is one of my maxims to act promptly when once my mind is made up. Noon of the next day found me ascending the spiral stone staircase which leads to Mr. Brocket's chambers, and admiring the succession of arrows and fingers upon the whitewashed wall, all indicating the direction of that gentleman's sanctum. As it happened, artificial aids of the sort were entirely unnecessary, as an animated flap-dance overhead could proceed from no other quarter, though it was replaced by a deathly silence as I groped my way up the stair. The door was opened by a youth evidently astounded at the appearance of a client, and I was ushered into the presence of my young friend, who was writing furiously in a large ledger—upside down, as I afterwards discovered.

After the first greetings, I plunged into business at once.

"Look here, Jack," I said, "I want you to get me a spirit, if you can."

"Spirits you mean!" shouted my wife's cousin, plunging his hand into the waste-paper basket and producing a bottle with the celerity of a conjuring trick. "Let's have a drink!"

I held up my hand as a mute appeal against such a proceeding so early in the day; but on lowering it again I

found that I had almost involuntarily closed my fingers round the tumbler which my adviser had pressed upon me. I drank the contents hastily off, lest any one should come in upon us and set me down as a toper. After all there was something very amusing about the young fellow's eccentricities.

"Not spirits," I explained smilingly; "an apparition—a ghost. If such a thing is to be had, I should be very willing to negotiate."

"A ghost for Goresthorpe Grange?" inquired Mr. Brocket, with as much coolness as if I had asked for a drawing-room suite.

"Quite so," I answered.

"Easiest thing in the world," said my companion, filling up my glass again in spite of my remonstrance. "Let us see!" Here he took down a large red note-book, with all the letters of the alphabet in a fringe down the edge. "A ghost you said, didn't you? That's G. G—gems—gimlets—gaspipes—gauntlets—guns—galleys. Ah, here we are. Ghosts. Volume nine, section six, page forty-one. Excuse me!" And Jack ran up a ladder and began rummaging among a pile of ledgers on a high shelf. I felt half inclined to empty my glass into the spittoon when his back was turned; but on second thoughts I disposed of it in a legitimate way.

"Here it is!" cried my London agent, jumping off the ladder with a crash, and depositing an enormous volume of manuscript upon the table. "I have all these things tabulated, so that I may lay my hands upon them in a moment. It's all right—it's quite weak" (here he filled our glasses again). "What were we looking up, again?"

"Ghosts," I suggested.

"Of course; page 41. Here we are. 'J. H. Fowler & Son, Dunkel Street, suppliers of mediums to the nobility and gentry; charms sold—love-philtres—mummies—horoscopes cast.' Nothing in your line there, I suppose?"

I shook my head despondingly.

"Frederick Tabb," continued my wife's cousin, "sole channel of communication between the living and the dead. Proprietor of the spirits of Byron, Kirke White, Grimaldi, Tom Cribb, and Inigo Jones. That's about the figure!"

"Nothing romantic enough there," I objected. "Good heavens! Fancy a ghost with a black eye and a handkerchief tied round its waist, or turning summersaults, and saying, 'How are you to-morrow?'" The very idea made me so warm that I emptied my glass and filled it again.

"Here is another," said my companion, "Christopher McCarthy; bi-weekly séances—attended by all the eminent spirits of ancient and modern times. Nativities—charms—abracadabras, messages from the dead." He might be able to help us. However, I shall have a hunt round myself to-morrow, and see some of these fellows. I know their haunts, and its odd if I can't pick up something cheap. So there's an end of business," he concluded, hurling the ledger into the corner, "and now we'll have something to drink."

We had several things to drink—so many that my inventive faculties were dulled next morning, and I had some little difficulty in explaining to Mrs. D'Odd why it was that I hung my boots and spectacles upon a peg along with my other garments before retiring to rest. The new hopes excited by the confident manner in which my agent had undertaken the commission caused me to rise superior to alcoholic reaction, and I paced about the rambling corridors and old-fashioned rooms, picturing to myself the appearance of my expected acquisition, and deciding what part of the building would harmonise best with its presence. After much consideration, I pitched upon the banqueting-hall as being, on the whole, most suitable for its reception. It was a long low room, hung round with valuable tapestry and interesting relics of the old family to whom it had belonged. Coats of mail and implements of war glimmered fitfully as the light of the fire played over them, and the wind crept under the door, moving the hangings to and fro with a ghastly rustling. At one end there was the raised daïs, on

which in ancient times the host and his guests used to spread their table, while a descent of a couple of steps led to the lower part of the hall, where the vassals and retainers held wassail. The floor was uncovered by any sort of carpet, but a layer of rushes had been scattered over it by my direction. In the whole room there was nothing to remind one of the nineteenth century; except, indeed, my own solid silver plate, stamped with the resuscitated family arms, which was laid out upon an oak table in the centre. This, I determined, should be the haunted room, supposing my wife's cousin to succeed in his negotiation with the spirit-mongers. There was nothing for it now but to wait patiently until I heard some news of the result of his inquiries.

A letter came in the course of a few days, which, if it was short, was at least encouraging. It was scribbled in pencil on the back of a playbill, and sealed apparently with a tobacco-stopper. "Am on the track," it said. "Nothing of the sort to be had from any professional spiritualist, but picked up a fellow in a pub yesterday who says he can manage it for you. Will send him down unless you wire to the contrary. Abrahams is his name, and he has done one or two of these jobs before." The letter wound up with some incoherent allusions to a cheque, and was signed by my affectionate cousin, John Brocket.

I need hardly say that I did not wire, but awaited the arrival of Mr. Abrahams with all impatience. In spite of my belief in the supernatural, I could scarcely credit the fact that any mortal could have such a command over the spirit-world as to deal in them and barter them against mere earthly gold. Still, I had Jack's word for it that such a trade existed; and here was a gentleman with a Judaical name ready to demonstrate it by proof positive. How vulgar and commonplace Jorrocks' eighteenth-century ghost would appear should I succeed in securing a real mediæval apparition! I almost thought that one had been sent down in advance, for, as I walked round the moat that

night before retiring to rest, I came upon a dark figure engaged in surveying the machinery of my portcullis and drawbridge. His start of surprise, however, and the manner in which he hurried off into the darkness, speedily convinced me of his earthly origin, and I put him down as some admirer of one of my female retainers mourning over the muddy Hellespont which divided him from his love. Whoever he may have been, he disappeared and did not return, though I loitered about for some time in the hope of catching a glimpse of him and exercising my feudal rights upon his person.

Jack Brocket was as good as his word. The shades of another evening were beginning to darken round Goresthorpe Grange, when a peal at the outer bell, and the sound of a fly pulling up, announced the arrival of Mr. Abrahams. I hurried down to meet him, half expecting to see a choice assortment of ghosts crowding in at his rear. Instead, however, of being the sallow-faced, melancholy-eyed man that I had pictured to myself, the ghost-dealer was a sturdy little podgy fellow, with a pair of wonderfully keen sparkling eyes and a mouth which was constantly stretched in a good-humoured, if somewhat artificial, grin. His sole stock-in-trade seemed to consist of a small leather bag jealously locked and strapped, which emitted a metallic chink upon being placed on the stone flags of the hall.

"And 'ow are you, sir?" he asked, wringing my hand with the utmost effusion. "And the missis, 'ow is she? And all the others—'ow's all their 'ealth?"

I intimated that we were all as well as could reasonably be expected; but Mr. Abrahams happened to catch a glimpse of Mrs. D'Odd in the distance, and at once plunged at her with another string of inquiries as to her health, delivered so volubly and with such an intense earnestness that I half expected to see him terminate his cross-examination by feeling her pulse and demanding a sight of her tongue. All this time his little eyes rolled round and round, shifting perpetually from the floor to the ceiling, and from the

ceiling to the walls, taking in apparently every article of furniture in a single comprehensive glance.

Having satisfied himself that neither of us was in a pathological condition, Mr. Abrahams suffered me to lead him up-stairs, where a repast had been laid out for him to which he did ample justice. The mysterious little bag he carried along with him, and deposited it under his chair during the meal. It was not until the table had been cleared and we were left together that he broached the matter on which he had come down.

"I hunderstand," he remarked, puffing at a trichinopoly, "that you want my 'elp in fitting up this 'ere 'ouse with a happarition."

I acknowledged the correctness of his surmise, while mentally wondering at those restless eyes of his, which still danced about the room as if he were making an inventory of the contents.

"And you won't find a better man for the job, though I says it as shouldn't," continued my companion. "Wot did I say to the young gent wot spoke to me in the bar of the Lame Dog? 'Can you do it?' says he. 'Try me,' says I, 'me and my bag. Just try me.' I couldn't say fairer than that."

My respect for Jack Brocket's business capacities began to go up very considerably. He certainly seemed to have managed the matter wonderfully well. "You don't mean to say that you carry ghosts about in bags?" I remarked, with diffidence.

Mr. Abrahams smiled a smile of superior knowledge. "You wait," he said; "give me the right place and the right hour, with a little of the essence of Lucoptolycus"—here he produced a small bottle from his waistcoat-pocket—"and you won't find no ghost that I ain't up to. You'll see them yourself, and pick your own, and I can't say fairer than that."

As all Mr. Abraham's protestations of fairness were accompanied by a cunning leer and a wink from one or other.

of his wicked little eyes, the impression of candour was somewhat weakened.

"When are you going to do it?" I asked reverentially.

"Ten minutes to one in the morning," said Mr. Abrahams, with decision. "Some says midnight, but I says ten to one, when there ain't such a crowd, and you can pick your own ghost. And now," he continued, rising to his feet, "suppose you trot me round the premises, and let me see where you wants it; for there's some places as attracts 'em, and some as they won't hear of—not if there was no other place in the world."

Mr. Abrahams inspected our corridors and chambers with a most critical and observant eye, fingering the old tapestry with the air of a connoisseur, and remarking in an undertone that it would "match uncommon nice." It was not until he reached the banqueting-hall, however, which I had myself picked out, that his admiration reached the pitch of enthusiasm. "'Ere's the place!" he shouted, dancing, bag in hand, round the table on which my plate was lying, and looking not unlike some quaint little goblin himself. "'Ere's the place; we won't get nothin' to beat this! A fine room—noble, solid, none of your electro-plate trash! That's the way as things ought to be done, sir. Plenty of room for 'em to glide here. Send up some brandy and the box of weeds; I'll sit here by the fire and do the preliminaries, which is more trouble than you think; for them ghosts carries on hawful at times, before they finds out who they've got to deal with. If you was in the room they'd tear you to pieces as like as not. You leave me alone to tackle them, and at half-past twelve come in, and I'll lay they'll be quiet enough by then."

Mr. Abraham's request struck me as a reasonable one, so I left him with his feet upon the mantelpiece, and his chair in front of the fire, fortifying himself with stimulants against his refractory visitors. From the room beneath, in which I sat with Mrs. D'Odd, I could hear that after sitting for some time he rose up, and paced about the hall with quick

impatient steps. We then heard him try the lock of the door, and afterwards drag some heavy article of furniture in the direction of the window, on which, apparently, he mounted, for I heard the creaking of the rusty hinges as the diamond-paned casement folded backwards, and I knew it to be situated several feet above the little man's reach. Mrs. D'Odd says that she could distinguish his voice speaking in low and rapid whispers after this, but that may have been her imagination. I confess that I began to feel more impressed than I had deemed it possible to be. There was something awesome in the thought of the solitary mortal standing by the open window and summoning in from the gloom outside the spirits of the nether world. It was with a trepidation which I could hardly disguise from Matilda that I observed that the clock was pointing to half-past twelve, and that the time had come for me to share the vigil of my visitor.

He was sitting in his old position when I entered, and there were no signs of the mysterious movements which I had overheard, though his chubby face was flushed as with recent exertion.

"Are you succeeding all right?" I asked as I came in, putting on as careless an air as possible, but glancing involuntarily round the round to see if we were alone.

"Only your help is needed to complete the matter," said Mr. Abrahams, in a solemn voice. "You shall sit by me and partake of the essence of Lucoptolycus, which removes the scales from our earthly eyes. Whatever you may chance to see, speak not and make no movement, lest you break the spell." His manner was subdued, and his usual cockney vulgarity had entirely disappeared. I took the chair which he indicated, and awaited the result.

My companion cleared the rushes from the floor in our neighbourhood, and going down upon his hands and knees, described a half circle with chalk, which enclosed the fireplace and ourselves. Round the edge of this half circle he drew several hieroglyphics, not unlike the signs of the

zodiac. He then stood up and uttered a long invocation, delivered so rapidly that it sounded like a single gigantic word in some uncouth guttural language. Having finished this prayer, if prayer it was, he pulled out the small bottle which he had produced before, and poured a couple of teaspoonfuls of clear transparent fluid into a phial, which he handed to me with an intimation that I should drink it.

The liquid had a faintly sweet odour, not unlike the aroma of certain sorts of apples. I hesitated a moment before applying it to my lips, but an impatient gesture from my companion overcame my scruples, and I tossed it off. The taste ws not unpleasant; and, as it gave rise to no immediate effects, I leaned back in my chair and composed myself for what was to come. Mr. Abrahams seated himself beside me, and I felt that he was watching my face from time to time while repeating some more of the invocations in which he had indulged before.

A sense of delicious warmth and languor began gradually to steal over me, partly, perhaps, from the heat of the fire, and partly from some unexplained cause. An uncontrollable impulse to sleep weighed down my eyelids, while, at the same time, my brain worked actively, and a hundred beautiful and pleasing ideas flitted through it. So utterly legarthic did I feel that, though I was aware that my companion put his hand over the region of my heart, as if to feel how it were beating, I did not attempt to prevent him, nor did I even ask him for the reason of his action. Everything in the room appeared to be reeling slowly round in a drowsy dance, of which I was the centre. The great elk's head at the far end wagged solemnly backwards and forwards, while the massive salvers on the tables performed cotillons with the claret cooler and the epergne. My head fell upon my breast from sheer heaviness, and I should have become unconscious had I not been recalled to myself by the opening of the door at the other end of the hall.

This door led on to the raised daïs, which, as I have mentioned, the heads of the house used to reserve for their

own use. As it swung slowly back upon its hinges, I sat up in my chair, clutching at the arms, and staring with a horrified glare at the dark passage outside. Something was coming down it—something unformed and intangible, but still a *something*. Dim and shadowy, I saw it flit across the threshold, while a blast of ice-cold air swept down the room, which seemed to blow through me, chilling my very heart. I was aware of the mysterious presence, and then I heard it speak in a voice like the sighing of an east wind among pine-trees on the banks of a desolate sea.

It said: "I am the invisible nonentity. I have affinities and am subtle. I am electric, magnetic, and spiritualistic. I am the great ethereal sigh-heaver. I kill dogs. Mortal, wilt thou choose me?"

I was about to speak, but the words seemed to be choked in my throat; and, before I could get them out, the shadow flitted across the hall and vanished in the darkness at the other side, while a long-drawn melancholy sigh quivered through the apartment.

I turned my eyes towards the door once more, and beheld, to my astonishment, a very small old woman, who hobbled along the corridor and into the hall. She passed backwards and forwards several times, and then, crouching down at the very edge of the circle upon the floor, she disclosed a face the horrible malignity of which shall never be banished from my recollection. Every foul passion appeared to have left its mark upon that hideous countenance.

"Ha! ha!" she screamed, holding out her wizened hands like the talons of an unclean bird. "You see what I am. I am the fiendish old woman. I wear snuff-coloured silks. My curse descends on people. Sir Walter was partial to me. Shall I be thine, mortal?"

I endeavoured to shake my head in horror; on which she aimed a blow at me with her crutch, and vanished with an eldritch scream.

By this time my eyes turned naturally towards the open

door, and I was hardly surprised to see a man walk in of tall and noble stature. His face was deadly pale, but was surmounted by a fringe of dark hair which fell in ringlets down his back. A short pointed beard covered his chin. He was dressed in loose-fitting clothes, made apparently of yellow satin, and a large white ruff surrounded his neck. He paced across the room with slow and majestic strides. Then turning, he addressed me in a sweet, exquisitely-modulated voice.

"I am the cavalier," he remarked. "I pierce and am pierced. Here is my rapier. I clink steel. This is a blood-stain over my heart. I can emit hollow groans. I am patronised by many old Conservative families. I am the original manor-house apparition. I work alone, or in company with shrieking damsels."

He bent his head courteously, as though awaiting my reply, but the same choking sensation prevented me from speaking; and, with a deep bow, he disappeared.

He had hardly gone before a feeling of intense horror stole over me, and I was aware of the presence of a ghastly creature in the room of dim outlines and uncertain proportions. One moment it seemed to pervade the entire apartment, while at another it would become invisible, but always leaving behind it a distinct consciousness of its presence. Its voice, when it spoke, was quavering and gusty. It said, "I am the leaver of footsteps and the spiller of gouts of blood. I tramp upon corridors. Charles Dickens has alluded to me. I make strange and disagreeable noises. I snatch letters and place invisible hands on people's wrists. I am cheerful. I burst into peals of hideous laughter. Shall I do one now?" I raised my hand in a deprecating way, but too late to prevent one discordant outbreak which echoed through the room. Before I could lower it the apparition was gone.

I turned my head towards the door in time to see a man come hastily and stealthily into the chamber. He was a sunburned powerfully-built fellow, with earrings in his ears

and a Barcelona handkerchief tied loosely round his neck. His head was bent upon his chest, and his whole aspect was that of one afflicted by intolerable remorse. He paced rapidly backwards and forwards like a caged tiger, and I observed that a drawn knife glittered in one of his hands, while he grasped what appeared to be a piece of parchment in the other. His voice, when he spoke, was deep and sonorous. He said, "I am a murderer. I am a ruffian. I crouch when I walk. I step noiselessly. I know something of the Spanish Main. I can do the lost treasure business. I have charts. Am able-bodied and a good walker. Capable of haunting a large park." He looked towards me beseechingly, but before I could make a sign I was paralysed by the horrible sight which appeared at the door.

It was a very tall man, if, indeed, it might be called a man, for the gaunt bones were protruding through the corroding flesh, and the features were of a leaden hue. A winding sheet was wrapped round the figure, and formed a hood over the head, from under the shadow of which two fiendish eyes, deepset in their grisly sockets, blazed and sparkled like red-hot coals. The lower jaw had fallen upon the breast, disclosing a withered, shrivelled tongue and two lines of black and jagged fangs. I shuddered and drew back as this fearful apparition advanced to the edge of the circle.

"I am the American blood-curdler," it said, in a voice which seemed to come in a hollow murmur from the earth beneath it. "None other is genuine. I am the embodiment of Edgar Allan Poe. I am circumstantial and horrible. I am a low-caste spirit-subduing spectre. Observe my blood and my bones. I am grisly and nauseous. No depending on artificial aid. Work with grave-clothes, a coffin-lid, and a galvanic battery. Turn hair white in a night." The creature stretched out its fleshless arms to me as if in entreaty, but I shook my head; and it vanished, leaving a low sickening repulsive odour behind it. I sank back in my chair, so overcome by terror and disgust that I would have

very willingly resigned myself to dispensing with a ghost altogether, could I have been sure that this was the last of the hideous procession.

A faint sound of trailing garments warned me that it was not so. I looked up, and beheld a white figure emerging from the corridor into the light. As it stepped across the threshold I saw that it was that of a young and beautiful woman dressed in the fashion of a bygone day. Her hands were clasped in front of her, and her pale proud face bore traces of passion and of suffering. She crossed the hall with a gentle sound, like the rustling of autumn leaves, and then, turning her lovely and unutterably sad eyes upon me, she said,

"I am the plaintive and sentimental, the beautiful and ill-used. I have been forsaken and betrayed. I shriek in the night-time and glide down passages. My antecedents are highly respectable and generally aristocratic. My tastes are æsthetic. Old oak furniture like this would do, with a few more coats of mail and plenty of tapestry. Will you not take me?"

Her voice died away in a beautiful cadence as she concluded, and she held out her hands as in supplication. I am always sensitive to female influences. Besides, what would Jorrocks' ghost be to this? Could anything be in better taste? Would I not be exposing myself to the chance of injuring my nervous system by interviews with such creatures as my last visitor, unless I decided at once? She gave me a seraphic smile, as if she knew what was passing in my mind. That smile settled the matter. "She will do!" I cried; "I choose this one;" and as, in my enthusiasm, I took a step towards her, I passed over the magic circle which had girdled me round.

"Argentine, we have been robbed!"

I had an indistinct consciousness of these words being spoken, or rather screamed, in my ear a great number of times without my being able to grasp their meaning. A violent throbbing in my head seemed to adapt itself to their rhythm,

and I closed my eyes to the lullaby of "Robbed, robbed, robbed." A vigorous shake caused me to open them again, however, and the sight of Mrs. D'Odd in the scantiest of costumes and most furious of tempers was sufficiently impressive to recall all my scattered thoughts, and make me realise that I was lying on my back on the floor, with my head among the ashes which had fallen from last night's fire, and a small glass phial in my hand.

I staggered to my feet, but felt so weak and giddy that I was compelled to fall back into a chair. As my brain became clearer, stimulated by the exclamations of Matilda, I began gradually to recollect the events of the night. There was the door through which my supernatural visitors had filed. There was the circle of chalk with the hieroglyphics round the edge. There was the cigar-box and brandy-bottle which had been honoured by the attentions of Mr. Abrahams. But the seer himself—where was he? and what was this open window with a rope running out of it? And where, O where, was the pride of Goresthorpe Grange, the glorious plate which was to have been the delectation of generations of D'Odds? And why was Mrs. D. standing in the gray light of dawn, wringing her hands and repeating her monotonous refrain? It was only very gradually that my misty brain took these things in, and grasped the connection between them.

Reader, I have never seen Mr. Abrahams since; I have never seen the plate stamped with the resuscitated family crest; hardest of all, I have never caught a glimpse of the melancholy spectre with the trailing garments, nor do I expect that I ever shall. In fact my night's experiences have cured me of my mania for the supernatural, and quite reconciled me to inhabiting the humdrum nineteenth century edifice on the outskirts of London which Mrs. D. has long had in her mind's eye.

As to the explanation of all that occurred—that is a matter which is open to several surmises. That Mr. Abrahams, the ghost-hunter, was identical with Jemmy Wilson, *alias* the

Nottingham crackster, is considered more than probable at Scotland Yard, and certainly the description of that remarkable burglar tallied very well with the appearance of my visitor. The small bag which I have described was picked up in a neighbouring field next day, and found to contain a choice assortment of jemmies and centrebits. Footmarks deeply imprinted in the mud on either side of the moat showed that an accomplice from below had received the sack of precious metals which had been let down through the open window. No doubt the pair of scoundrels, while looking round for a job, had overheard Jack Brocket's indiscreet inquiries, and had promptly availed themselves of the tempting opening.

And now as to my less substantial visitors, and the curious grotesque vision which I had enjoyed—am I to lay it down to any real power over occult matters possessed by my Nottingham friend? For a long time I was doubtful upon the point, and eventually endeavoured to solve it by consulting a well-known analyst and medical man, sending him the few drops of the so-called essence of Lucoptolycus which remained in my phial. I append the letter which I received from him, only too happy to have the opportunity of winding up my little narrative by the weighty words of a man of learning.

"Arundel Street.

"Dear Sir,—Your very singular case has interested me extremely. The bottle which you sent contained a strong solution of chloral, and the quantity which you describe yourself as having swallowed must have amounted to at least eighty grains of the pure hydrate. This would of course have reduced you to a partial state of insensibility, gradually going on to complete coma. In this semi-unconscious state of chloralism it is not unusual for circumstantial and *bizarre* visions to present themselves—more especially to individuals unaccustomed to the use of the drug. You tell me in your note that your mind was saturated with ghostly literature, and that you had long taken a morbid interest in

classifying and recalling the various forms in which apparitions have been said to appear. You must also remember that you were expecting to see something of that very nature, and that your nervous system was worked up to an unnatural state of tension. Under the circumstances, I think that, far from the sequel being an astonishing one, it would have been very surprising indeed to any one versed in narcotics had you not experienced some such effects.—I remain, dear sir, sincerely yours,

"T. E. STUBE, M.D.

"Argentine D'Odd, Esq.,
The Elms, Brixton."

THE BOX WITH THE IRON CLAMPS.

I.

MOLTON CHASE is a charming, old-fashioned country house, which has been in the possession of the Clayton family for centuries past; and as Harry Clayton, its present owner, has plenty of money, and (having tasted the pleasures of matrimony for only five years) has no knowledge (as yet) of the delights of college and school bills coming in at Christmas-time, it his will to fill the Chase at that season with guests, to each of whom he extends a welcome, as hearty as it is sincere.

"Bella! are you not going to join the riding-party this afternoon?" he said across the luncheon-table to his wife, one day in a December not long ago.

"Bella" was a dimpled little woman, whose artless expression of countenance would well bear comparison with the honest, genial face opposite to her, and who replied at once—

"No! not this afternoon, Harry, dear. You know the Damers may come at any time between this and seven o'clock, and I should not like to be out when they arrive."

"And may I ask Mrs. Clayton who *are* the Damers," inquired a friend of her husband, who, on account of being handsome, considered himself licensed to be pert—"that their advent should be the cause of our losing the pleasure of your company this afternoon?"

But the last thing Bella Clayton ever did was to take offence.

"The Damers are my cousins, Captain Moss," she replied; "at least Blanche Damer is."

At this juncture a dark-eyed man who was sitting at the other end of the table dropped the flirting converse he had been maintaining with a younger sister of Mrs. Clayton's, and appeared to become interested in what his hostess was saying.

"Colonel Damer," she continued, "has been in India for the last twelve years, and only returned to England a month ago; therefore it would seem unkind on the first visit he has paid to his relatives that there should be no one at home to welcome him."

"Has Mrs. Damer been abroad for as long a time?" resumed her questioner, a vision arising on his mental faculties of a lemon-coloured woman with shoes down at heel.

"Oh dear no!" replied his hostess. "Blanche came to England about five years ago, but her health has been too delicate to rejoin her husband in India since. Have we all finished, Harry, dear?"—and in another minute the luncheon-table was cleared.

As Mrs. Clayton crossed the hall soon afterwards to visit her nursery, the same dark-eyed man who had regarded her fixedly when she mentioned the name of Blanche Damer followed and accosted her.

"Is it long since you have seen your cousin Mrs. Damer, Mrs. Clayton?"

"I saw her about three years ago, Mr. Laurence; but she had a severe illness soon after that, and has been living on the Continent ever since. Why do you ask?"

"For no especial reason," he answered smiling. "Perhaps I am a little jealous lest this new-comer to whose arrival you look forward with so much interest should usurp more of your time and attention than we less-favoured ones can spare."

He spoke with a degree of sarcasm, real or feigned, which Mrs. Clayton immediately resented.

"I am not aware that I have been in the habit of neglecting my guests, Mr. Laurence," she replied; "but my cousin

Blanche is more likely to remind me of my duties than to tempt me to forget them."

"Forgive me," he said, earnestly. "You have mistaken my meaning altogether. But are you very intimate with this lady?"

"Very much so," was the answer. "We were brought up together, and loved each other as sisters until she married and went to India. For some years after her return home our intercourse was renewed, and only broken, on the occasion of her being ill and going abroad, as I have described to you. Her husband, I have, of course, seen less of, but I like what I know of him, and am anxious to show them both all the hospitality in my power. She is a charming creature, and I am sure you will admire her."

"Doubtless I shall," he replied; "that is if she does not lay claim to all Mrs. Clayton's interest in the affairs of Molton Chase."

"No fear of that," laughed the cheery little lady as she ascended the stairs, and left Mr. Laurence standing in the hall beneath.

"Clayton," observed that gentleman, as he re-entered the luncheon-room and drew his host into the privacy of a bay-window, "I really am afraid I shall have to leave you this evening—if you won't think it rude of me to go so suddenly."

"But *why*, my dear fellow?" exclaimed Harry Clayton, as his blue eyes searched into the other's soul. "What earthly reason can you have for going, when your fixed plan was to stay with us over Christmas Day?"

"Well! there is lots of work waiting for you to do, you know; and really the time slips away so, and time is money to a slave like myself—that——"

"Now, my dear Laurence," said Harry Clayton, conclusively, "you know you are only making excuses. All the work that was absolutely necessary for you to do before Christmas was finished before you came here, and you said you felt yourself licensed to take a whole month's holiday. Now, was not that the case?"

Mr. Laurence could not deny the fact, and so he looked undecided, and was silent.

"Don't let me hear any more about your going before Christmas Day," said his host, "or I shall be offended, and so will Bella; to say nothing of Bella's sister—eh, Laurence!"

Whereupon Mr. Laurence felt himself bound to remain; and saying in his own mind that fate was against him, dropped the subject of his departure altogether.

One hour later, the riding party being then some miles from Molton Chase, a travelling carriage laden with trunks drove up to the house, and Mrs. Clayton, all blushes and smiles, stood on the hall-steps to welcome her expected guests.

Colonel Damer was the first to alight. He was a middle-aged man, but with a fine soldierly bearing, which took off from his years; and he was so eager to see to the safe exit of his wife from the carriage-door that he had not time to do more than take off his hat to blooming Bella on the steps.

"Now, my love," he exclaimed as the lady's form appeared, "pray take care; two steps: that's right—here you are, safe."

And then Mrs. Damer, being securely landed, was permitted to fly into the cousinly arms which were opened to receive her.

"My dear Bella!"

"My dearest Blanche—I am so delighted to see you again. Why, you are positively frozen! Pray come in at once to the fire. Colonel Damer, my servants will see to the luggage—do leave it to them, and come and warm yourselves."

A couple of men-servants now came forward and offered to see to the unloading of the carriage—but Mrs. Damer did not move.

"Will you not go in, my love, as your cousin proposes?" said her husband. "I can see to the boxes if you should wish me to do so."

"No, thank you," was the low reply; and there was such

a ring of melancholy in the voice of Mrs. Damer that a stranger would have been attracted by it. "I prefer waiting until the carriage is unpacked."

"Never mind the luggage, Blanche," whispered Mrs. Clayton, in her coaxing manner. "Come in to the fire, dear —I have so much to tell you."

"Wait a minute, Bella," said her cousin; and the entreaty was so firm that it met with no further opposition.

"One—two—three—four," exclaimed Colonel Damer, as the boxes successively came to the ground. I am afraid you will think we are going to take you by storm, Mrs. Clayton; but perhaps you know my wife's fancy for a large travelling *kit* of old. Is that all, Blanche?"

"That is all—thank you," in the same low melancholy tones in which she had spoken before. "Now, Bella, dear, which is to be my room?"

"You would rather go there first, Blanche?"

"Yes, please—I'm tired. Will you carry up that box for me?" she continued, pointing out one of the trunks to the servant.

"Directly, ma'am," he returned, as he was looking for change for a sovereign wherewith to accommodate Colonel Damer—but the lady lingered until he was at leisure. Then he shouldered the box next to the one she had indicated, and she directed his attention to the fact, and made him change his burden.

"They'll all go up in time, ma'am," the man remarked; but Mrs. Damer, answering nothing, did not set her foot upon the stairs until he was half-way up them, with the trunk she had desired him to take first.

Then she leaned wearily upon Bella Clayton's arm, pressing it fondly to her side, and so the two went together to the bedroom which had been appointed for the reception of the new guests. It was a large and cosily-furnished apartment, with a dressing room opening from it. When the ladies arrived there they found the servant awaiting them with the box in question.

"Where will you have it placed, ma'am?" he demanded of Mrs. Damer.

"Under the bed, please."

But the bedstead was a French one, and the mahogany sides were so deep that nothing could get beneath them but dust; and the trunk, although small, was heavy and strong and clamped with iron, not at all the sort of trunk that would go *anywhere*.

"Nothing will go under the bed, ma'am!" said the servant in reply.

Mrs. Damer slightly changed colour.

"Never mind then: leave it there. Oh! what a comfort a good fire is," she continued, turning to the hearth-rug, and throwing herself into an arm-chair. "We have had such a cold drive from the station."

"But about your box, Blanche?" said Mrs. Clayton, who had no idea of her friends being put to any inconvenience. "It can't stand there; you'll unpack it, won't you? or shall I have it moved into the passage?"

"Oh, no, thank you, Bella—please let it stand where it is: it will do very well indeed."

"What will do very well?" exclaimed Colonel Damer, who now entered the bedroom, followed by a servant with another trunk.

"Only Blanche's box, Colonel Damer," said Bella Clayton. "She doesn't wish to unpack it, and it will be in her way here, I'm afraid. It *might* stand in your dressing-room."—This she said as a "feeler," knowing that some gentlemen do not like to be inconvenienced, even in their dressing-rooms.

But Colonel Damer was as unselfish as it was possible for an old Indian to be.

"Of course it can," he replied. "Here (to the servant), just shoulder that box, will you, and move it into the next room."

The man took up the article in question rather carelessly, and nearly let it fall again. Mrs. Damer darted forward as if to save it.

"Pray put it down," she said, nervously. "I have no wish to have it moved—I shall require it by-and-by; it will be no inconvenience——"

"Just as you like dear," said Mrs. Clayton, who was becoming rather tired of the little discussion. "And now take off your things, dear Blanche, and let me ring for some tea."

Colonel Damer walked into his dressing-room and left the two ladies alone. The remainder of the luggage was brought upstairs; the tea was ordered and served, and whilst Mrs. Clayton busied herself in pouring it out, Mrs. Damer sank back upon a sofa which stood by the fire, and conversed with her cousin.

She had been beautiful, this woman, in her earlier youth, though no one would have thought it to see her now. As Bella handed her the tea she glanced towards the thin hand stretched out to receive it, and from thence to the worn face and hollow eyes, and could scarcely believe she saw the same person she had parted from three years before.

But she had not been so intimate with her of late, and she was almost afraid of commenting upon her cousin's altered appearance, for fear it might wound her; all she said was:

"You look very delicate still, dear Blanche; I was in hopes the change to the Continent would have set you up and made you stronger than you were when you left England."

"Oh, no; I never shall be well again," was Mrs. Damer's careless reply; "its an old story now, Bella, and it's no use talking about it. Who have you staying in the house at present, dear?"

"Well, we are nearly full," rejoined Mrs. Clayton. "There is my old godfather, General Knox—you remember him, I know—and his son and daughter; and the Ainsleys and their family; ditto, the Bayleys and the Armstrongs, and then, for single men, we have young Brooke, and Harry's old friend, Charley Moss, and Herbert Laurence, and—are you ill, Blanchey?"

An exclamation had burst from Mrs. Damer—hardly an exclamation, so much as a half-smothered cry—but whether of pain or fear, it was hard to determine.

"Are you ill?" reiterated Mrs. Clayton, full of anxiety for her fragile-looking cousin.

"No," replied Blanche Damer, pressing her hand to her side, but still deadly pale from the effect of whatever emotion she had gone through; "it is nothing; I feel faint after our long journey."

Colonel Damer had also heard the sound, and now appeared upon the threshold of his dressing-room. He was one of those well-meaning, but fussy men, who can never leave two women alone for a quarter of an hour without intruding on their privacy.

"Did you call, my dearest?" he asked of his wife. "Do you want anything?"

"Nothing, thank you," replied Bella for her cousin; "Blanche is only a little tired and overcome by her travelling."

"I think, after all, that I will move that trunk away for you into my room," he said, advancing towards the box which had already been the subject of discussion. Mrs. Damer started from the sofa with a face of crimson.

"I *beg* you will leave my boxes alone," she said, with an imploring tone in her voice which was quite unfitted to the occasion. "I have not brought one more than I need, and I wish them to remain under my own eye."

"There must be something very valuable in that receptacle," said Colonel Damer, facetiously, as he beat a retreat to his own quarters.

"Is it your linen box?" demanded Mrs. Clayton of her cousin.

"Yes," in a hesitating manner; "that is, it contains several things that I have in daily use; but go on about your visitors, Bella: are there any more?"

"I don't think so: where had I got to?—oh! to the bachelors: well, there are Mr. Brooke and Captain Moss,

and Mr. Laurence (the poet, you know; Harry was introduced to him last season by Captain Moss), and my brother Alfred; and that's all."

"A very respectable list," said Mrs. Damer, languidly. "What kind of a man is the—the poet you spoke of?"

"Laurence?—oh, he seems a very pleasant man; but he is very silent and abstracted, as I suppose a poet should be. My sister Carrie is here, and they have quite got up a flirtation together; however, I don't suppose it will come to anything."

"And your nursery department?"

"Thriving, thank you; I think you *will* be astonished to see my boy. Old Mrs. Clayton says he is twice the size that Harry was at that age; and the little girls can run about and talk almost as well as I can. But I must not expect you, Blanche, to take the same interest in babies that I do."

This she added, remembering that the woman before her was childless. Mrs. Damer moved uneasily on her couch, but she said nothing; and soon after the sound of a gong reverberating through the hall warned Mrs. Clayton that the dinner was not far off and the riding-party must have returned; so, leaving her friend to her toilet, she took her departure.

As she left the room, Mrs. Damer was alone. She had no maid of her own, and she had refused the offices of Mrs. Clayton, assuring her that she was used to dress herself; but she made little progress in that department, as she lay on the couch in the firelight, with her face buried in her hands, and thoughts coursing through her mind of which heaven alone knew the tendency.

"Come, my darling," said the kind, coaxing voice of her husband, as, after knocking more than once without receiving any answer, he entered her room, fully dressed, and found her still arrayed in her travelling things, and none of her boxes unpacked. "You will never be ready for dinner at this rate. Shall I make an excuse for your not appearing

at table this evening? I am sure Mrs. Clayton would wish you to keep your room if you are too tired to dress."

"I am not too tired, Harry," said Mrs. Damer, rising from the couch, "and I shall be ready in ten minutes," unlocking and turning over the contents of a box as she spoke.

"Better not, perhaps, my love," interposed the colonel, in mild expostulation; "you will be better in bed, and can see your kind friends to-morrow morning."

"I am going down to dinner to-night," she answered, gently, but decisively. She was a graceful woman now she stood on her feet, and threw off the heavy wraps in which she had travelled, with a slight, willowy figure, and a complexion which was almost transparent in its delicacy; but her face was very thin, and her large blue eyes had a scared and haggard look in them, which was scarcely less painful to witness than the appearance of anxiety which was expressed by the knitted brows by which they were surmounted. As she now raised her fair attenuated hands to rearrange her hair, which had once been abundant and glossy, her husband could not avoid remarking upon the change which had passed over it.

"I had no idea you had lost your hair so much, darling," he said; "I have not seen it down before to-night. Why, where is it all gone to?" he continued, as he lifted the light mass in his hands, and remembered of what a length and weight it used to be, when he last parted from her.

"Oh, I don't know," she rejoined, sadly; "gone, with my youth, I suppose, Henry."

"My poor girl!" he said, gently, "you have suffered very much in this separation. I had no right to leave you alone for so many years. But it is all over now, dearest, and I will take such good care of you that you will be obliged to get well and strong again."

She turned round suddenly from the glass, and pressed her lips upon the hand which held her hair.

"Don't," she murmured; "pray don't speak to me so, Henry! I can't bear it; I can't indeed!"

He thought it was from excess of feeling that she spoke; and so it was, though not as he imagined. So he changed the subject lightly, and bade her be lazy no longer, but put on her dress, if she was really determined to make one of the party at dinner that evening.

In another minute, Mrs. Damer had brushed her diminished hair into the fashion in which she ordinarily wore it; thrown on an evening-robe of black, which, while it contrasted well with her fairness, showed the falling away of her figure in a painful degree; and was ready to accompany her husband down-stairs.

They were met at the door of the drawing-room by their host, who was eager to show cordiality towards guests of whom his wife thought so much, and having also been acquainted himself with Mrs. Damer since her return to England. He led her up to the sofa whereon Bella sat; and, dinner being almost immediately announced, the little hostess was busy pairing off her couples.

"Mr. Laurence!" she exclaimed; and then looking around the room, "where *is* Mr. Laurence?" So that that gentleman was forced to leave the window-curtains, behind which he had ensconced himself, and advance into the centre of the room. "Oh, here you are at last; will you take Mrs. Damer down to dinner?" and proceeding immediately with the usual form of introduction—"Mr. Laurence—Mrs. Damer."

They bowed to each other; but over the lady's face, as she went through her share of the introduction, there passed so indescribable, and yet so unmistakable a change, that Mrs. Clayton, although not very quick, could not help observing it, and she said, involuntarily—

"Have you met Mr. Laurence before, Blanche?"

"I believe I have had that pleasure—in London—many years ago."

The last words came out so faintly that they were almost undistinguishable.

"Why didn't you tell me so?" said Bella Clayton, reproachfully, to Mr. Laurence.

He was beginning to stammer out some excuse about its having been so long ago, when Mrs. Damer came to his aid, in her clear, cold voice—

"It *was* very long ago: we must both be forgiven for having forgotten the circumstance."

"Well, you must renew your acquaintanceship at dinner," said Mrs. Clayton, blithely, as she trotted off to make matters pleasant between the rest of her visitors. As she did so, Mr. Laurence remained standing by the sofa, but he did not attempt to address Mrs. Damer. Only, when the room was nearly cleared, he held out his arm to her, and she rose to accept it. But the next minute she had sunk back again upon the sofa, and Mrs. Clayton was at her cousin's side. Mrs. Damer had fainted.

"Poor darling!" exclaimed Colonel Damer, as he pressed forward to the side of his wife. "I was afraid coming down to-night would be too much for her, but she would make the attempt; she has so much spirit. Pray don't delay the dinner, Mrs. Clayton; I will stay by her, if you will excuse the apparent rudeness, until she is sufficiently recovered to go to bed."

But even as he spoke his wife raised herself from the many arms which supported her, and essayed to gain her feet.

"Bella, dear! I am all right again. Pray, if you love me, don't make a scene about a little fatigue. I often faint now: let me go up to my bedroom and lie down, as I ought to have done at first, and I shall be quite well to-morrow morning."

She would accept no one's help—not even her husband's, though it distressed him greatly that she refused it—but walked out of the room of her own accord, and toiled wearily up the staircase which led to the higher stories; whilst more than one pair of eyes watched her ascent, and more than one appetite was spoilt for the coming meal.

"Don't you think that Blanche is looking very ill?" demanded Bella Clayton of Colonel Damer, at the dinner-table. She had been much struck herself with the great alteration in her cousin's looks, and fancied that the husband was not so alarmed about it as he ought to be.

"I do, indeed," he replied; "but it is the last thing she will acknowledge herself. She has very bad spirits and appetite; appears always in a low fever, and is so nervous that the least thing will frighten her. That, to me, is the worst and most surprising change of all: such a high-couraged creature as she used to be."

"Yes, indeed," replied Mrs. Clayton; "I can hardly imagine Blanche being nervous at anything. It must have come on since her visit to the Continent, for she was not so when she stayed here last."

"When was that?" demanded the Colonel, anxiously.

"Just three years ago this Christmas," was the answer. "I don't think I ever saw her look better than she did then, and she was the life of the house. But soon afterwards she went to Paris, and then we heard of her illness, and this is my first meeting with her since that time. I was very much shocked when she got out of the carriage: I should scarcely have known her again." Here Mrs. Clayton stopped, seeing that the attention of Mr. Laurence, who sat opposite to her, appeared to be riveted on her words, and Colonel Damer relapsed into thought and spoke no more,

In the meanwhile Mrs. Damer had gained her bedroom. Women had come to attend upon her, sent by their mistress, and laden with offers of refreshment and help of every kind, but she had dismissed them and chosen to be alone. She felt too weak to be very restless, but she had sat by the fire and cried, until she was so exhausted that her bed suggested itself to her, as the best place in which she could be; but rising to undress, preparatory to seeking it, she had nearly fallen, and catching feebly at the bedpost had missed it, and sunk down by the side of the solid black box, which was clamped with iron and fastened with a padlock, and respect-

ing which she had been so particular a few hours before. She felt as if she was dying, and as if this were the fittest place for her to die on. "There is nothing in my possession," she cried, "that really belongs to me but *this*—this which I loathe and abhor, and love and weep over at one and the same moment." And, strange to relate, Mrs. Damer turned on her side and kneeling by the iron-clamped chest pressed her lips upon its hard, unyielding surface, as if it had life wherewith to answer her embrace. And then the wearied creature dragged herself up again into an unsteady position, and managed to sustain it until she was ready to lie down upon her bed.

The next morning she was much better. Colonel Damer and Bella Clayton laid their heads together and decided that she was to remain in bed until after breakfast, therefore she was spared meeting with the assembled strangers until the dinner-hour again, for luncheon was a desultory meal at Molton Chase, and scarcely any of the gentlemen were present at it that day. After luncheon Mrs. Clayton proposed driving Mrs. Damer out in her pony-chaise.

"I don't think you will find it cold, dear, and we can come home by the lower shrubberies and meet the gentlemen as they return from shooting," Colonel Damer being one of the shooting party. But Mrs. Damer had declined the drive, and made her cousin understand so plainly that she preferred being left alone, that Mrs. Clayton felt no compunction in acceding to her wishes, and laying herself out to please the other ladies staying in the house.

And Mrs. Damer did wish to be alone. She wanted to think over the incidents of the night before, and devise some plan by which she could persuade her husband to leave the Grange as soon as possible without provoking questions which she might find it difficult to answer. When the sound of the wheels of her cousin's pony-chaise had died away, and the great stillness pervading Molton Grange proclaimed that she was the sole inmate left behind, she dressed herself in a warm cloak, and drawing the hood over her

head prepared for a stroll about the grounds. A little walk she thought would do her good, and with this intention she left the house. The Grange gardens were extensive and curiously laid out, and there were many winding shrubbery paths about them, which strangers were apt to find easier to enter than to find their way out of again. Into one of these Mrs. Damer now turned her steps for the sake of privacy and shelter; but she had not gone far before, on turning an abrupt corner, she came suddenly upon the figure of the gentleman she had been introduced to the night before, Mr. Laurence, who she had imagined to be with the shooting party. He was half lying, half sitting across a rustic seat which encircled the huge trunk of an old tree, with his eyes bent upon the ground and a cigar between his lips. He was more an intellectual and fine-looking than a handsome man, but he possessed two gifts which are much more winning than beauty, a mind of great power, and the art of fascination. As Mrs. Damer came full in view of him, too suddenly to stop herself or to retreat, he rose quickly from the attitude he had assumed when he thought himself secure from interruption and stood in her pathway. She attempted to pass him with an inclination of the head, but he put out his hand and stopped her.

"Blanche! you must speak to me; you shall not pass like this; I insist upon it!" and she tried in vain to disengage her arm from his detaining clasp.

"Mr. Laurence, what right have you to hold me thus?"

"What right, Blanche? The right of every man over the woman who loves him!"

"That is your right over me no longer. I have tried to avoid you. You have both seen and known it! No *gentleman* would force himself upon my notice in this manner."

"Your taunt fails to have any effect upon me. I have sought an explanation of your extraordinary conduct from you in vain. My letters have been unanswered, my entreaties for a last interview disregarded; and now that chance has brought us together again, I must have what I

have a right to ask from your own lips. I did not devise this meeting; I did not even know you had returned to England till yesterday, and then I sought to avoid you; but it was fated that we should meet, and it is fated that you satisfy my curiosity."

"What do you want to know?" she asked, in a low voice.

"First, have you ceased to love me?"

The angry light which had flashed across her face when he used force to detain her died away; the pallid lips commenced to tremble, and in the sunken eyes large tear-drops rose and hung quivering upon the long eyelashes,

"Enough, Blanche," Mr. Laurence continued, in a softer voice. "Nature answers me. I will not give you the needless pain of speaking. Then, why did you forsake me? Why did you leave England without one line of farewell, and why have you refused to hold any communication with me since that time?"

"I *could* not," she murmured. "You do not know; you cannot feel; you could never understand my feelings on that occasion."

"That is no answer to my question, Blanche," he said firmly, "and an answer I will have. What was the immediate cause of your breaking faith with me? I loved you, you know how well. What drove you from me? Was it fear, or indifference, or a sudden remorse?"

"It was," she commenced slowly, and then as if gathering up a great resolution, she suddenly exclaimed, "Do you *really* wish to know what parted us?"

"I really intend to know," he replied, and the old power which he had held over her recommenced its sway. "Whatever it was it has not tended to your happiness," he continued, "if I may judge from your looks. You are terribly changed, Blanche! I think even I could have made you happier than you appear to have been."

"I have had enough to change me," she replied. "If you will know then, come with me, and I will show you."

"To-day?"

"At once; to-morrow may be too late." She began to walk towards the house as she spoke, rapidly and irregularly, her heart beating fast, but no trace of weakness in her limbs; and Herbert Laurence followed her, he scarcely knew why, excepting that she had desired it.

Into Molton Grange she went, up the broad staircase and to her chamber door before she paused to see if he was following. When she did so she found that he stood just behind her on the wide landing.

"You can enter," she said, throwing open the door of her bedroom, "don't be afraid; there is nothing here except the cause for which I parted with you." In her agitation and excitement, scarcely pausing to fasten the door behind her, Mrs. Damer fell down on her knees before the little black box with its iron clamps and ponderous padlock; and drawing a key from her bosom, applied it to the lock, and in another minute had thrown back the heavy lid. Having displaced some linen which lay at the top, she carefully removed some lighter materials, and then calling to the man behind her, bid him look in and be satisfied. Mr. Laurence advanced to the box, quite ignorant as to the reason of her demand; but as his eye fell upon its contents, he started backwards and covered his face with his hands. As he drew them slowly away again he met the sad, earnest look with which the kneeling woman greeted him, and for a few moments they gazed at one another in complete silence. Then Mrs. Damer withdrew her eyes from his and rearranged the contents of the black box; the heavy lid shut with a clang, the padlock was fast again, the key in her bosom, and she rose to her feet and prepared to leave the room in the same unbroken silence. But he again detained her, and this time his voice was hoarse and changed.

"Blanche! tell me, is this the truth?"

"As I believe in heaven," she answered.

"And this was the reason that we parted—this the sole cause of our estrangement?"

"Was it not enough?" she said. "I erred, but it was as



Mr. Laurence advanced to the box.

one in a dream. When I awoke I could no longer err and be at peace. At peace did I say? I have known no peace since I knew you; but I should have died and waked up in hell if I had not parted with you. This is all the truth, believe it or not as you will; but there may, there can be nothing in future between you and me. Pray let me pass you."

"But that—that—box, Blanche!" exclaimed Herbert Laurence, with drops of sweat, notwithstanding the temperature of the day, upon his forehead. "It was an accident, a misfortune; *you* did not do it?"

She turned upon him eyes which were full of mingled horror and scorn.

"*I* do it!" she said, "what are you dreaming of? I was mad, but not so mad as that! How could you think it?" and the tears rose in her eyes more at the supposition which his question had raised than at the idea that he could so misjudge her.

"But why do you keep this? why do you carry it about with you, Blanche? It is pure insanity on your part. How long is it since you have travelled in company with that dreadful box?"

"More than two years," she said in a fearful whisper. "I have tried to get rid of it, but to no purpose; there was always some one in the way. I have reasoned with myself, and prayed to be delivered from it, but I have never found an opportunity. And now, what does it matter? The burden and heat of the day are past."

"Let me do it for you," said Mr. Laurence. "Whatever our future relation to one another, I cannot consent that you should run so terrible a risk through fault of mine. The strain upon your mind has been too great already. Would to heaven I could have borne it for you! but you forbid me even the privilege of knowing that you suffered. Now that I have ascertained it, it must be my care that the cause of our separation shall at least live in your memory only." And as he finished speaking he attempted to lift

the box; but Mrs. Damer sprang forward and prevented him.

"Leave it!" she cried; "do not dare to touch it; it is *mine!* It has gone wherever I have gone for years. Do you think, for the little space that is left me, that I would part with the only link left between me and my dread past?" and saying this she threw herself upon the black trunk and burst into tears.

"Blanche! you love me as you ever did," exclaimed Herbert Laurence. "These tears confess it. Let me make amends to you for this; let me try to make the happiness of your future life!"

But before his sentence was concluded Mrs. Damer had risen from her drooping attitude and stood before him.

"Make amends!" she echoed scornfully. "How can you 'make amends?' Nothing can wipe out the memory of the shame and misery that I have passed through, nothing restore the quiet conscience I have lost. I do not know if I love you still or not. When I think of it, my head swims, and I only feel confused and anxious. But I am sure of one thing, that the horror of my remorse for even having listened to you has power to overwhelm any regret that may be lingering in my unworthy breast, and that the mere fact of your bodily presence is agony to me. When I met you to-day I was battling with my invention to devise some means of leaving the place where you are without exciting suspicion. If you ever loved, have pity on me now; take the initiative, and rid me of yourself."

"Is this your final decision, Blanche?" he asked, slowly. "Will you not regret it when too late, and you are left alone with only *that?*"

She shuddered, and he caught at the fact as a sign of relenting.

"Dearest, loveliest," he commenced.—This woman had been the loveliest to him in days gone past, and though she was so terribly changed in eyes that regarded her less, Herbert Laurence, her once lover, could still trace above the

languor and debility and distress of her present appearance, the fresh, sparkling woman who had sacrificed herself for his sake; and although his style of address signified more than he really thought for her, the knowledge of how much she had undergone since their separation had the power to make him imagine that this partial reanimation of an old flame was a proof that the fire which kindled it had never perished. Therefore it did not appear absurd in his mental eyes to preface his appeal to Mrs. Damer thus: "Dearest, loveliest——," but she turned upon him as though he had insulted her.

"Mr. Laurence!" she exclaimed, "I have told you that the past is past; be good enough to take me at my word. Do you think that I have lived over two years of solitary shame and grief, to break the heart that trusts in me *now?* If I had any wish, or any thought to the contrary, it would be impossible. I am enveloped by kind words and acts, by care and attention, which chain me as closely to my home as if I were kept a prisoner between four walls. I could not free myself if I would," she continued, throwing back her arms, as though she tried to break an invisible thrall. "I must die first; the cords of gratitude are bound about me so closely. It is killing me, as nothing else could kill," she added, in a lower voice. "I lived under your loss, and the knowledge of my own disgrace; but I cannot live under his perpetual kindness and perfect trust. It cannot last much longer: for mercy's sake, leave me in peace until the end comes!"

"And the box?" he demanded.

"I will provide for the box before that time," she answered, sadly; "but if you have any fear, keep the key yourself: the lock is not one that can be forced."

She took the key from her bosom, where it hung on a broad black ribbon, as she spoke, and handed it to him. He accepted it without demur.

"You are so rash," he said; "it will be safer with me: let me take the box also?"

"No, no!" said Mrs. Damer, hurriedly; "you shall not; and it would be no use. If it were out of my sight, I should dream that it was found, and talk of it in my sleep. I often rise in the night now to see if it is safe. Nothing could do away with it. If you buried it, some one would dig it up; if you threw it in the water, it would float. It would lie still nowhere but on my heart, where it ought to be!—it ought to be!"

Her eyes had reassumed the wild, restless expression which they took whilst speaking of the past, and her voice had sunk to a low, fearful whisper.

"This is madness," muttered Herbert Laurence; and he was right. On the subject of the black box Mrs. Damer's brain was turned.

He was just about to speak to her again, and try to reason her out of her folly, when voices were heard merrily talking together in the hall, and her face worked with the dread of discovery.

"Go!" she said; "pray, go at once. I have told you everything." And in another moment Herbert Laurence had dashed through the passage to the privacy of his own room; and Mrs. Clayton, glowing from her drive, and with a fine rosy baby in her arms, had entered the apartment of her cousin.

II.

Bella found her cousin sitting in an arm-chair, with the cloak still over her shoulders, and a face of ashy whiteness, the reaction of her excitement.

"My dear, how ill you look!" was her first exclamation. "Have you been out?"

"I went a little way into the shrubberies," said Mrs. Damer; "but the day turned so cold."

"Do you think so? We have all been saying what a genial afternoon it is: but it certainly does not seem to have agreed with you. Look at my boy: isn't he a fine fellow?—

he has been out all day in the garden. I often wish you had a child, Blanchey."

"Do you, dear? it is more than I do."

"Ah, but you can't tell, till they are really yours, how much pleasure they give you; no one knows who has not been a mother."

"No; I suppose not."

Mrs. Damer shivered as she said the words, and looked into the baby's fat, unmeaning face with eyes of sad import. Mrs. Clayton thought she had wounded her cousin, and stooped to kiss the slight offence away; but she fancied that Blanche almost shrunk from her embrace.

"She must be really ill," thought the kindly little Bella, who had no notion of such a thing as heart-sickness for an apparently happy married woman. "She ought to see a doctor: I shall tell Colonel Damer so."

In another half-hour they were at her side together, urging her to take their advice.

"Now, my darling," said the Colonel, when Mrs. Damer faintly protested against being made a fuss about, "you must be good for my sake. You know how precious you are to me, and how it would grieve me to have you laid up; let me send for Dr. Barlow, as your cousin advises. You were very much overcome by the long journey here, and I am afraid the subsequent excitement of seeing your kind friends has been too much for you. You do not half know how dear you are to me, Blanche, or you would not refuse such a trifling request. Here have I been, for five years, dearest, only looking forward from day to day to meeting my dear loving little wife again; and then to have you so ill as this, the first month of our reunion, is a great trial to me. Pray let me send for Dr. Barlow."

But Mrs. Damer pleaded for delay. She had become chilled through being out in the shrubberies; she had not yet got over the fatigue of her journey; she had caught a cold whilst crossing from Havre to Folkestone: it was anything and everything but an illness which required medical atten-

dance. If she were not better in the morning, she promised to make no opposition to their wishes.

So she forced herself to rise and dress for dinner. She appeared there calm and collected, and continued so throughout the evening, talking with Mr. Laurence quite as much as with the rest of the company; and she went to bed at the same hour as the other guests of Molton Grange, receiving with her cousin's good-night, congratulations on the evident improvement of her health.

"I cannot quite make out what has come to that cousin of yours, Bella," said Harry Clayton to his wife, as they too retired for the night; "she doesn't appear half such a jolly woman as she used to be."

"She is certainly very much altered," was Mrs. Clayton's response; "but I think it must be chiefly owing to her health; a feeling of debility is so very depressing."

"I suppose it can't be anything on her mind, Bella?" suggested the husband, after a pause.

"On her *mind*, Harry!" said Bella, sitting up in bed in her wonderment; "of course not; why, how could it be? She has everything she can wish for; and, I am sure, no woman could have a more devoted husband than Colonel Damer. He has been speaking a great deal about her to me to-day, and his anxiety is something enormous. On her *mind!*—what a funny idea, Harry; what could have put that in your head?"

"I am sure I don't know," was the husband's reply, rather ruefully given, as if conscious he had made a great mistake.

"You old *goose*," said his wife, with an emphatic kiss, as she composed herself to her innocent slumbers.

But before they were broken by nature, in the grey of the morning, Mrs. Clayton was roused by a tapping at the bedroom door; a tapping to which all Mr. Clayton's shouts to "come in," only served as a renewal.

"Who can it be, Harry?—do get up and see," said Bella. So Harry got up, like a dutiful husband, and opened the

door, and the figure of Colonel Damer, robed in a dressing-gown, and looking very shadowy and unreal in the dawning, presented itself on the threshold.

"Is your wife here?" demanded the Colonel briefly.

"Of course she is," said Mr. Clayton, wondering what the Colonel wanted with her.

"Will she come to Mrs. Damer? she is *very* ill," was the next sentence, delivered tremblingly.

"Very ill!" exclaimed Bella, jumping out of bed and wrapping herself in a dressing-gown. "How do you mean, Colonel Damer?—when did it happen?"

"God knows!" he said, in an agitated voice; "but for some time after she fell asleep she was feverish and excited, and spoke much. I woke suddenly in the night and missed her, and going in search of her with a light, found her fallen on the landing."

"Fainted?" said Bella.

"I don't know now whether it was a faint or a fit," he replied, "but I incline to the latter belief. I carried her back to her bed, and gave her some restoratives, not liking to disturb you——"

"Oh! why didn't you, Colonel Damer?" interposed his hostess.

"——and thought she was better, till just now, when she had another attack of unconsciousness, and is so weak after it she cannot move. She has fever too, I am sure, from the rapidity of her pulse, and I don't think her head is quite clear."

"Harry, dear, send for Dr. Barlow at once," thrusting her naked feet into slippers, "and come back with me, Colonel Damer; she should not be left for a minute."

And she passed swiftly along the corridor to her cousin's room. As she neared that of Mr. Laurence, the door opened a little, and a voice asked huskily—

"Is anything the matter, Mrs. Clayton? I have been listening to noises in the house for the last hour."

"My cousin, Mrs. Damer, has been taken ill, Mr. Laurence, but we have sent for the doctor; I am going to her now."

And as the door closed again she fancied that she heard a sigh.

Blanche Damer was lying on her pillows very hot and flushed, with that anxious, perturbed look which the eyes assume when the brain is only half clouded, and can feel itself to be wandering.

"Blanche, dearest," cried Bella, as she caught sight of her face, "what is the matter? How did this happen?"

"I dreamt that he had taken it," said Mrs. Damer, slowly and sadly; "but it was a mistake: he must not have it yet —not yet! only a little while to wait now!—but he has the key."

"Her mind is wandering at present," said Colonel Damer, who had followed Mrs. Clayton into the room.

"Oh, Colonel Damer," exclaimed Bella, tearfully, "how dreadful it is!—she frightens me! Could she have knocked her head in falling? Have you no idea why she got up and went into the passage?"

"Not the slightest," he returned. And now that she examined him under the morning light, which was by this time streaming through the open shutters, Bella Clayton saw how aged and haggard his night's anxiety had made him look. "My wife has been very subject to both sleep-talking and walking since my return, and I have several times missed her, as I did last night, and found her walking about the room in her sleep, but she has never been like this before. When I first found her in the passage, I asked her why she had gone there, or what she wanted, and she said, 'the key.' When I had re-lifted her into bed, I found her bunch of keys as usual, on the dressing-table, therefore I imagine she could not then have known what she was talking about. I trust Dr. Barlow will not be long in coming; I am deeply anxious."

And he looked the truth of what he uttered; whilst poor little Mrs. Clayton could only press his hand and entreat him to be hopeful; and his wife lay on her pillows, and silently stared into vacancy.

As soon as the doctor arrived he pronounced the patient to be suffering from an attack of pressure on the brain, and wished to know whether she had not been subjected to some great mental shock or strain.

Here Colonel Damer came forward and stoutly denied the possibility of such a thing. He had joined his wife from India a month ago, at which time she was, though in delicate, not in bad health, and he had never left her since. They had crossed from Havre to Folkestone three days before, and Mrs. Damer had not complained of any unusual sickness or fatigue. She was a person of a highly excitable and nervous temperament, and her appetite and spirit were variable; otherwise there had been nothing in her state of health to call for anxiety on the part of her friends.

Dr. Barlow listened to all these statements, and believed as much of them as he chose. However he waived the subject of the cause of the disaster; the fact that it had occurred was undeniable; and the remedies then in vogue for such emergencies were immediately resorted to. But leeching and cupping, shaving, icing, and blistering, all proved alike ineffectual, for the simple reason that the irrevocable fiat had gone forth, and Blanche Damer was appointed to die.

As the day wore on, and the case assumed a darker aspect, and the doctor's prognostications became less hopeful, Colonel Damer worked himself into a perfect frenzy of fear.

"Save her, Dr. Barlow," he had said to that gentleman, in the insane manner in which people are used to address the Faculty, as if it was in their power to do more than help the efforts of nature. "Save her life, for God's sake! and there is nothing that I can can do for you, of earthly good, that shall not be yours. Shall I call in other advice? Shall I telegraph to London? Is there anyone there who can save her? It is my life as well as hers that is trembling in the scale. For the love of heaven, do not stand on ceremony, but only tell me what is best to be done!"

Of course Dr. Barlow told him that if he was not perfectly

satisfied, he should wish him to telegraph to town for further advice, and mentioned several names celebrated in such cases; at the same time he assured Colonel Damer that he did not believe any number of doctors could do more for the patient than he was doing, and that it was impossible to guess at the probable termination of the illness for some days to come.

Bella Clayton gave up the duty of amusing her guests, and stationed herself at the bedside of her cousin; and the unhappy husband wandered in and out of the room like a ghost; trying to think upon each fresh visit, that there was a slight improvement in the symptoms, and spending the intervening time in praying for the life which he fondly imagined had been devoted to himself. Meanwhile, whenever Mrs. Damer opened her lips, it was to ramble on in this manner:—

"Dying!" her hollow voice would exclaim; "crushed to death beneath the weight of a pyramid of blessings that lies like lead upon my chest and reaches to the ceiling. Kind words—fond care, and sweet attentions—they bow me down to the earth! I am stifling beneath the burden of their silent reproaches. Two and two are four; and four is eight; eight times locked should be secure—but there is a worm that dieth not, and a fire that is not quenched."

"Oh! don't come in here, Colonel Damer," poor Bella would exclaim, as the unhappy man would creep to the foot of the bed and stand listening, with blanched cheeks, to the delirious ravings of his wife. "She doesn't know what she is saying, remember; and she will be better to-morrow, doubtless. Don't distress yourself more, by listening to all this nonsense."

"I don't believe she will ever be better, Mrs. Clayton," he replied, on one of these occasions. This was on the third day.

"Dearest!" the sick woman resumed, in a plaintively soft voice, without being in the least disturbed by the conversation around her, "if you have ever loved me, you will believe

in this hour that I love you in return. If you have given me your love, I have given you more than my life."

"Does she speak of me?" demanded Colonel Damer.

"I think so," said Bella Clayton, sadly.

"Take it off! take it off!" cried Mrs. Damer, starting with terror—"this box—this iron-clamped box which presses on my soul. What have I done? Where shall I go? How am I to meet him again?"

"What does she say?" asked the Colonel, trembling.

"Colonel Damer, I must beg you to quit the room," said Bella, weeping. "I cannot bear to stay here with both of you. Pray leave me alone with Blanche until she is quieter."

And so the husband left the chamber, with fellow tears in his eyes, and she set herself to the painful task of attempting to soothe the delirious woman.

"If he would only strike me," moaned Mrs. Damer, "or frown at me, or tell me that I lie, I could bear it better; but he is killing me with kindness. Where is the box?—open it—let him see all. I am ready to die. But I forgot—there is no key, and no one shall touch it; it is mine—mine. Hark! I hear it! I hear it! How could I put it there? Let me go—no one shall hold me! Let me go, I say—I *hear* it; and—and—the world is nothing to me!"

At last, when they had almost despaired of ever seeing her sleep again, there came an uninterrrupted hour of repose from sheer weariness; and then wide-open hollow eyes—a changed voice sounding with the question—"Bella! have I been ill?" and Mrs. Damer's delirium was over.

Over with her life. For on his next visit Dr. Barlow found her sensible but cold and pulseless, and broke to her friends the news that twelve hours more would end her existence.

Colonel Damer went wild, and telegraphed at once to London for men who arrived when his wife was ready to be coffined. Bella heard the decree and wept silently; and a great gloom fell upon the guests of Molton Chase, who had

been left altogether on poor Harry's hands since Mrs. Damer's illness.

The dying woman lay very silent and exhausted for some time after she had waked from that brief, memory-restoring sleep. When she next spoke, she said, observing her cousin's swollen eyes—

"Am I dying, Bella?"

Poor little Mrs. Clayton did not at all know what answer to make to such a direct question, but she managed to stammer out something which, whatever it was meant for, was taken as affirmative by the one it most concerned.

"I thought so. Shall I never be able to get out of bed again?"

"I am afraid not, darling—you are so weak!"

"Yes, I am—I can hardly raise my hand. And yet I must rise if I can. I have something so particular to do."

"Cannot I do it for you, Blanche?"

"*Will* you do it, Bella?"

"Anything—everything, love! How can you ask me?"

"And you will promise secrecy? Let me look in your face. Yes, it is a true face, as it has ever been, and I can trust you. Have the black box moved out of my room before I die, Bella—mind, *before* I die, and placed in your own dressing-room."

"What, dear, your linen box?"

"Yes, my linen box, or whatever you choose to call it. Take it away *at once*, Bella. Tell no one; and when I am dead, have it buried in my grave. Surely you could manage so much for me!"

"And Colonel Damer?"

"If you speak to him about it, Bella, or to your husband, or to any one, I'll never forgive you, and I'm dying!" cried Mrs. Damer, almost rising in her excitement. "Oh! why have I delayed it so long, why did I not see to this before? I cannot even die in peace."

"Yes, yes, dearest Blanche, I will do it, indeed I will," said Mrs. Clayton, alarmed at her emotion; "and no one

shall know of it but myself. Shall I send it to my room at once? You may trust entirely to my discretion. Pray, have no fear!"

"Yes! at once—directly; it cannot be too soon!" said Mrs. Damer, falling back exhausted on her pillow. So a servant was called, and the iron-clamped box was carried away from the sick-room and secreted in Mrs. Clayton's private apartment. Mrs. Damer seemed so weak, that her cousin suggested summoning her husband to her side, but she appeared to shrink from an interview with him.

"I have nothing to say but what will make him sad to think of afterwards," she murmured. "Let me die with you alone, dear Bella. It is better so."

So Colonel Damer, although he went backwards and forwards all the night, was not called at any particular moment to see the last of his wife, and Blanche had her wish. She died alone with her faithful little cousin before the morning broke. As she was just going, she said, in a vague sort of manner—

"Tell him, Bella, that I forgive him as I hope to be forgiven. And that I have seen Heaven open to-night, and a child spirit pleading with the Woman-born for us; and that the burden is lifted off my soul at last." And then she added solemnly—"I will arise and go to my Father——," and went before she could finish the sentence.

Innocent Bella repeated her last message in perfect faith to Colonel Damer.

"She told me to tell you, that she felt herself forgiven, and that she had seen Heaven opened for her, and the weight of her sins was lifted off her soul. Oh! Colonel Damer, pray think of that, and take comfort. She is happier than you could make her."

But the poor faithful husband was, for the present, beyond all reach of comfort.

The London doctors arrived with the daylight, and had to be solemnly entertained at breakfast, and warmed and comforted before they were despatched home again. The

Christmas guests were all packing up their boxes, preparatory to taking their leave of Molton Chase, for it was impossible to think of festivities with such a bereavement in the house. And Harry Clayton told his wife that he was very thankful that they thought of doing so.

"It has been a most unfortunate business altogether, Bella, and of course they all felt it, poor things; and the more so because they could take no active part in it. The house has had a pall over it the last week; and it would have been still worse if they had remained. As for Laurence, I never saw a man so cut up. He has eaten nothing since your poor cousin was taken ill. One would think she had been his sister, or his dearest friend."

"Is he going with the rest, Harry?"

"No; he will stay till after the funeral; then he is going abroad. He feels deeply with you, Bella, and desired me to tell you so."

"He is very good—thank him in my name."

But released from the care of thinking for her guests, and sitting crying alone in her dressing-room, poor Mrs. Clayton could not imagine what to do with the iron-clamped black box. She had promised Blanche not to confide in her husband, or Colonel Damer. The latter, having no family vault, wished to lay the remains of his wife amongst those of the Claytons in the country churchyard of Molton; but how to get the black box conveyed to the grave without the knowledge of the chief mourners was a mystery beyond the fathoming of Bella's open heart. But in the midst of her perplexity, Fate sent her aid. On the second day of her cousin's death, a gentle tap sounded at her chamber door, and on her invitation to enter being answered, she was surprised to see Mr. Laurence on the threshold—come, as she imagined, to offer his sympathy in person.

"This is very kind of you, Mr. Laurence," she said.

"I can scarcely claim your gratitude, Mrs. Clayton. I have sought you to speak on a very important but

painful subject. May I ask your attention for a few moments?"

"Of course you may!" And she motioned him to a seat.

"It concerns her whom we have lost. Mrs. Clayton, tell me truly—did you love your cousin?"

"Dearly—very dearly, Mr. Laurence. We were brought up together."

"Then I may depend on your discretion; and if you wish to save her memory you must exercise it in her behalf. There is a small iron-clamped black trunk amongst her boxes, which must not fall into Colonel Damer's hands. Will you have that box conveyed from her chamber to your own, and (if you will so far trust my honour) make it over to me?"

"To you, Mr. Laurence—the iron-bound box? What possible knowledge can you have of my cousin's secret?"

"Her secret?"

"Yes—she confided that box to my care the night she died. She made me promise to do (without question) what you have just asked me to perform, and I did it. The trunk is already here."

And throwing open a cupboard at the side of the room, she showed him the chest which he had mentioned.

"I see that it is," he answered. "How do you design disposing of it?"

"She wished it to be buried in her grave."

"That is impossible in its present state. The contents must be removed."

"But how?" Mrs. Clayton demanded, in surprise. "It is locked and double locked, and there is no key."

"*I* have the key," he answered, gravely.

"Oh! Mr. Laurence," exclaimed his hostess, trembling, "there is some dreadful mystery here. For heaven's sake tell me what it is! What connection can you possibly have with this box of my poor cousin's, if you have only met her once in your life?"

"Did she say so?" he asked.

"No; but I fancied so. Have you known her? When? where? and why did you not tell us so before?"

"How can I tell you now?" he said, gazing into the pure womanly face upraised to his own, bearing an expression which was half-surprise and half-fear, but which seemed as though it could never dream of anything like shame.

"You are too good and too happy, Mrs. Clayton, to know of, or be able to sympathise with, the troubles and temptations which preceded our fatal friendship and her fall."

"Blanche's *fall!*" ejaculated Bella Clayton, in a voice of horror.

"Don't interrupt me, please, Mrs. Clayton," he said, hurriedly, covering his face with his hands, "or I shall never be able to tell you the wretched story. I knew your cousin years ago. Had you any suspicion that she was unhappy in her marriage?"

"No! none!" replied Bella, with looks of surprise.

"She *was* then, thoroughly unhappy, as scores of women are, simply because the hearts of the men they are bound to are opposed to theirs in every taste and feeling. I met her when she first returned to England, and—it is the old story, Mrs. Clayton—I loved her, and was mad enough to tell her so. When a selfish man and an unselfish woman have mutually confessed their preference for each other, the result is easily anticipated. I ruined her—forgive my plain speaking—and she still loved on, and forgave me."

"Oh, Blanche!" exclaimed Bella Clayton, hiding her hot face in her hands.

"We lived in a fool's paradise for some months, and then one day she left her house and went to the Continent, without giving me any warning of her intention. I was thunderstruck when I heard it, and deeply hurt, and as soon as I had traced her to Paris, I followed and demanded an explanation of her conduct. But she refused to see me, and when she found me pertinacious, left the city as suddenly as she had done that of London. Since which time she has answered no letters of mine, nor did we ever

meet until, most unexpectedly, I met her in your house. My pride, after her first refusals to see me, was too great to permit me to renew my entreaties, and so I called her a flirt, and inconstant. I tried to banish her remembrance from my heart—and I thought I had succeeded."

"Oh, my poor darling!" exclaimed Mrs. Clayton. "This accounts then for her holding aloof from all her relations for so long a time, by which means she estranged herself from many of them. She was working out her penitence and deep remorse in solitary misery; and she would not even let me share her confidence. But about the box, Mr. Laurence; what has all this to do with the black box?"

"When I met her in your shrubbery the other day, and reproached her for her desertion of me, insisting upon her giving me the reason of her change of mind, she bade me follow her to her own apartment. There, unlocking the box before you, she showed me its contents."

"And they are——?" inquired Mrs. Clayton, breathlessly.

"Would you like to see them?" he demanded, taking a key from his pocket. "I have as much right to show them you as she would have had. But is your love for her dead memory and reputation strong enough to insure your eternal secrecy on the subject?"

"It is," said Bella Clayton, decidedly.

"This box," continued Mr. Laurence, applying the key he held to the lock of the iron-clamped black trunk, has accompanied my poor girl on all her travels for the last two years. The dreadful secret of its contents which she bore in silent, solitary misery all that time has been, I believe, the ultimate cause of her death, by proving too heavy a burden for the sensitive and proud spirit which was forced to endure the knowledge of its shame. She was killed by her remorse. If you have courage, Mrs. Clayton, for the sight, look at *this*—and pity the feelings I must endure as I kneel here and look at it with you."

He threw back the lid and the topmost linen as he spoke, and Bella Clayton pressed eagerly forward to see, carefully

laid amidst withered flowers and folds of cambric, the tiny skeleton of a new-born creature whose angel was even then beholding the face of his Father in Heaven.

She covered her eyes with her clasped hands, no less to shut out the sight than to catch the womanly tears which poured forth at it, and then she cried between her sobs—

"Oh! my poor, poor Blanche, what must she not have suffered! God have mercy on her soul!"

"Amen!" said Herbert Laurence.

"You will let me take the box away with me, Mrs. Clayton?" he asked, gently.

She looked up as he spoke, and the tears were standing in his eyes.

"Yes—yes," she said; "take it away; do what you will with it, only never speak of it to me again."

He never did but once, and that was but an allusion. On the evening of the day on which they committed the remains of Blanche Damer to the dust, he lay in wait for Mrs. Clayton on the landing.

"All has been done as she desired," he whispered; and Mrs. Clayton asked for no further explanation. The secret of which she had been made an unwilling recipient pressed so heavily on her conscience, that she was thankful when he left Molton Grange and went abroad, as he had expressed his intention of doing.

Since which time she has never seen Herbert Laurence again; and Colonel Damer, whose grief at the funeral and for some time after was nearly frenzied, having—like most men who mourn much outwardly—found a source of consolation in the shape of another wife, the story of Blanche Damer's life and death is remembered, for aught her cousin knows to the contrary, by none but herself.

I feel that an objection will be raised to this episode by some people on the score of its being *unnatural;* to whom all I can say in answer is, that the principal incident on which the interest of it turns—that of the unhappy Mrs. Damer having been made so great a coward by conscience

that she carried the proof of her frailty about with her for years, too fearful of discovery to permit it to leave her sight —is *a fact.*

To vary the circumstances under which the discovery of the contents of the black box was finally made, and to alter the names of places and people so as to avoid general recognition, I have made my province: to relate the story itself, since, in the form I now present it to my readers, it can give pain to no one, I consider my privilege.

THE VEILED PORTRAIT.

It has been asserted that one cannot hold intercourse with that which is generally called the Unseen World, or behold anything supernatural, and live; but these ideas, from my own experience, I am inclined to doubt.

In the year subsequent to the great Bengal mutiny, I found myself at home on sick leave. My health had been injured by service in India, and by our sufferings consequent on the revolt; while my nervous system had been so seriously shaken by a grape-shot wound received at Lucknow, that it was completely changed, and I became cognisant of many things so utterly new to me, and so bewildering, that until I read Baron Reichenbach's work on magnetism and crystalism, I feared that I was becoming insane. I was sensible of the power of a magnet over me, though it might be three rooms distant, and twice, in darkness which seemed perfect to others, my room became filled with light; but the Baron holds that darkness is full of light, and that to increase the sensitiveness of the visual organs is to render that rare and dissipated light susceptible, with all that it may *contain*.

I was now compelled to acknowledge the existence of that new power in nature which the Baron calls the Odic Light, and of many other phenomena that are described in "Der Geist in der Natur," of Christian Oersted—the understanding that pervades all things.

But to my story.

Nearly a year had elapsed since the mutiny. The massacres at Delhi, Lucknow, Cawnpore, and elsewhere, had been fearfully avenged by that army of retribution which

marched from Umballah, and I found myself in London, enfeebled, enervated, and, as the saying is, "weak as a child." The bustle of the great capital stunned and bewildered me; thus I gladly accepted a hearty invitation which I received from Sidney Warren, one of "ours," but latterly of the Staff Corps, to spend a few weeks—months if I chose—at his place in Herts; a fine old house of the Tudor times, approached from the London road by an avenue that was a grand triumphal arch of nature's own creation, with lofty interlacing boughs and hanging foliage.

Who, thought I, that was lord of such a place could dream of broiling in India—of sweltering in the white-washed barrack at Dumdum, or the thatched cantonments of Delhi or Meerut!

My friend came hurrying forth to meet me.

"How goes it, old fellow? Welcome to my new quarters," he exclaimed.

"Well, Sidney, old man, how are you?"

Then we grasped each other's hands as only brother soldiers do.

I found Warren, whom I had not seen since the commencement of the revolt, nearly as much changed and shattered in constitution as myself; but I knew that he had lost those whom he loved most in the world amid the massacre at Meerut. He received me, however, with all the warmth of an old comrade, for we had a thousand topics in common to con over; while the regiment, which neither of us might ever see again—he certainly not, as he had sold out—would prove an endless source of conversation.

Sidney Warren was in his fortieth year, but looked considerably older. His once dark hair and coal-black moustache were quite grizzled now. The expression of his face was one of intense sadness, as if some secret grief consumed him; while there was a weird and far-seeing expression that led me to fear he was not fated to be long in this world. Yet he had gone through the storm of the Indian war without receiving even a scratch! Why was this?

Before I had spent two days with Sidney, he had shown me all the objects of interest around the Warren and in it—the portrait gallery, with its courtiers in high ruffs, and dames in the long stomachers of one period and *décolleté* dresses of another; his collection of Indian antiquities, amassed at the plundering of Delhi; and those which were more interesting to me, ponderous suits of mail which had been hacked and battered in the wars of the Roses, and a torn pennon unfurled by Warren's troop of horse, "for God and the King," at Naseby.

But there was one object which he would neither show nor permit me to look upon, and which seemed to make him shiver or shudder whenever it caught his eye, and this was a picture of some kind in the library—a room he very rarely entered. It was the size of a life portrait, but covered closely by a green-baize hanging. Good taste compelled me to desist from talking to him on the subject, but I resolved to gratify my curiosity on the first convenient occasion; so one day when he was absent at the stable court I drew back the hanging of this mysterious picture.

It proved to be the full-length portrait of a very beautiful girl—a proud and stately one, too—bordering on blooming womanhood. Her features were clearly cut and classic; she had an olive-coloured complexion, that seemed to tell of another land than England, yet the type of her rare beauty was purely English. Her forehead was broad and low; her dark eyes, that seemed to haunt and follow me, were deeply set, with black brows well defined; her chin was rather massive, as if indicating resolution of character, yet the soft, ripe lips were full of sweetness; while the gorgeous coils of her dark hair were crisp and wavy. Her attire was a green riding-habit, the skirt of which was gathered in her left hand, while the right grasped the bridle of her horse.

It was *not* a portrait of his wife, whom I remember to have been a fair-haired little woman; so *who* was this mysterious lady? I cannot describe the emotion this portrait excited within me; but I started and let fall the curtain,

with a distinct sensation of some one, or *something* I could not see, being close beside me; so I hurried from the shady library into the sunshine. Lovely though the face—I can see it yet in all its details—it haunted me with an unpleasant pertinacity, impossible either to analyse or portray. But I was a creature of fancies then.

"Herein," thought I, "lurks some mystery, which may never be cleared up to me." But in this surmise I was wrong, for one night—the night of Sunday, the 10th May, *the first anniversary* of the outbreak at Meerut, after we had discussed an excellent dinner, with a bottle or two of Moselle, and betaken us to iced brandy *pawnee* (for so we still loved to call it), and to the "soothing weed," on the sofas of the smoking-room, Warren became suddenly seized by one of those confidential fits which many men unaccountably have at such times, and, while he unsparingly and bitterly reproached himself for the part he had acted in it, I drew from him, little by little, the secret story of his life.

Some ten years before those days of which I write, when in the Guards, and deeply dipped in debt by extravagance, he had, unknown to his family, married secretly a beautiful girl who was penniless, at the very time his friends were seeking to retrieve his fortune by a wealthy alliance. An exchange into the Line—"the sliding scale"—became necessary, thus he was gazetted to our regiment in India, at a period when his young wife was in extremely delicate health; so much so that the idea of her voyaging round the Cape—there were no P. and O. Liners then—was not to be thought of, as it was expressly forbidden by the medical men; so they were to be separated for a time; and that time of parting, so dreaded by Constance, came inexorably.

The last fatal evening came—the last Sidney was to spend with her. His strapped overlands and bullock-trunks, his sword and cap, both cased, were already in the entrance hall; the morrow's morning would see him off by the train for Southampton, and his place would be vacant; and she should see his fond hazel eyes no more.

"Tears again!" said he, almost impatiently, while tenderly caressing the dark and glossy hair of his girl-wife; "why on earth are you so sad, Conny, about this temporary separation?"

"Would that I could be certain it is only such!" she exclaimed. "Sad; oh, can you ask me, Sidney, darling? The presentiment of a great sorrow to come is hanging over me."

"A presentiment, Constance! Do not indulge in this folly."

"If I did not love you dearly, Sidney, would such a painful emotion rack my heart?"

"It is the merest superstition, darling, and you will get over it when I am fairly away."

Her tender eyes regarded him wistfully for a moment, and then her tears fell faster at the contemplation of the coming loneliness.

After a pause, she asked:

"Are there many passengers going out with you?"

"A few—in the cuddy," he replied carelessly.

"Do you know any of them?"

"Yes; one or two fellows on the staff."

"And the ladies?" she asked, after another pause.

"I don't know, Conny dear; what do they matter to me?"

"I heard incidentally that—that Miss Dashwood was going out in your vessel."

"Indeed; I believe she will."

Constance shivered, for with the name of this finished flirt that of her husband had been more than once linked, and his change of colour was unseen by her as he turned to manipulate a cigar. So for four, perhaps six months, these two would be together upon the sea.

Constance knew too well the irritable nature of her husband's temper to say more on the subject of her secret thoughts; and deeply loth was she that such ideas should embitter the few brief hours they were to be together now; so a silence ensued, which, after a time, she broke, while

taking between her slender fingers a hand of Sidney, who was leaning half moodily, half listlessly against the mantelpiece, twisting his moustache with a somewhat mingled expression of face.

"Sidney, darling," said she entreatingly, "do forgive me if I am dull and sad—so *triste*—this evening."

"I do forgive you, little one."

"You know, Sidney, that I would die for you!"

"Yes; but don't, Conny—for I hate scenes," said he, playfully kissing her sweetly sad, upturned face; and the poor girl was forced to be contented with this matter-of-fact kind of tenderness.

So the dreaded morrow came with its sad moment of parting.

To muffle the sound of the departing wheels she buried her head, with all its wealth of dark, dishevelled hair, among the pillows of her bed, and some weeks—weeks of the most utter loneliness—elapsed, ere she left it, with the keen and ardent desire to recover health and strength, to the end that she might follow her husband over the world of waters and rejoin him; but the strength and health, so necessary for the journey, were long of coming back to her.

She had hoped he would write to her before sailing from Southampton—a single line would have satisfied the hungry cravings of her heart; but, as he did not do so, she supposed there was not time; yet the transport lay three days in the docks after the troops were on board. He would write by some passing ship, he had said, and one letter, dated from Ascension, reached her; but its cold and careless tone struck a mortal chill to the sensitive heart of Constance, and one or two terms of endearment it contained were manifestly forced and ill-expressed.

"He writes me thus," she muttered, with her hand pressed upon her heaving bosom; "thus—and with that woman, perpaps, by his side!"

She consulted the map, and saw how far, far away on the lonely ocean was that island speck. Months had elapsed

since *he* had been there; so she knew that he must be in India now, and she had the regular mails to look to with confidence—a confidence, alas! that soon faded away. Long, tender, and passionate was the letter she wrote in reply; she fondly fixed the time when she proposed to leave England and rejoin him, if he sent her the necessary remittances; but mail after mail came in without any tidings from Sidney, and she felt all the unspeakable misery of watching the postman for letters that never, never came!

Yet she never ceased to write, entreating him for answers and assuring him of unswerving affection.

Slowly, heavily, and imperceptibly a year passed away—a whole year—to her now a black eternity of time!

"Could Sidney be dead?" she asked herself with terror; but she knew that his family (who were all unaware of her existence) had never been in mourning, as they must infallibly have been in the event of such a calamity; and in her simplicity she never thought of applying to the Horse Guards for information concerning him—more information than she might quite have cared to learn.

Her old thoughts concerning Miss Dashwood took a strange hold of her imagination now: a hundred "trifles light as air" came back most gallingly to memory and took coherent and tangible shapes; but a stray number of the "Indian Mail" informed her of the marriage of Miss Dashwood—her *bête-noir*—to a Major Milton; and also that the regiment to which Sidney belonged "was moving up country," a phrase to her perplexing and vague.

Her funds were gone—her friends were few and poor. Her jewels—his treasured presents—were first turned into cash; then the furniture of her pretty villa, and next the villa itself with its sweet rose-garden, had to be exchanged for humbler apartments in a meaner street; and, ere long, Constance Warren found, that if she was to live, it must be by her own unaided efforts; and for five years she maintained a desperate struggle for existence—five years!

A lady going to India "wanted a young person as a governess and companion."

To India—*to India!* On her knees Constance prayed that her application might prove successful; and her prayer was heard, for out of some hundred letters—from a few which were selected—the tenor of hers suited best the taste of the lady in question. She said nothing of her marriage or of her apparent desertion; but as her wedding ring, which, with a fond superstition of the heart, she never drew from her finger, told a tale, she had to pass for a widow.

So in the fulness of time she found herself far away from England, and duly installed with an Anglo-Indian family in one of the stately villas of the European quarter of Calcutta—a veritable palace in the city of palaces, overlooking the esplanade before Fort William—in charge of one sickly, but gentle little pale-faced girl.

She had been a month there when her employer's family proposed to visit some relatives at Meerut, where she heard that Sidney's regiment was cantoned! To her it seemed as if the hand of Fate was in all this. Oh the joy of such tidings! Some one there must be able to unravel the horrible mystery involving his fate; for by this time she had ascertained that his name was out of the corps; but her heart suggested that he might have exchanged into another.

"If alive, is he worth caring for?" She often asked this of herself, but thrust aside the idea, and pursued with joy the long journey up country by river steamers, dawk-boats, and otherwise, on the Ganges to Jehangeerabad, from whence they were to travel by carriages to the place of their destination, some fifty miles distant.

On the way Constance had an addition to her charge in the person of a little boy, who, with his *ayah*, was going to join his parents at Meerut. This little boy was more than usually beautiful, with round and dimpled cheeks, dark hazel eyes, curly golden hair, and a sweet and winning smile. Something in the child's face or its expression attracted deeply the attention of Constance, and seemed to

stir some memory in her heart. Where had she seen those eyes before?

She drew the boy caressingly towards her, and when kissing his fair and open forehead, her eyes fell involuntarily on a ring that secured his necktie, a mere blue riband. It was of gold, and on it were graven the initials C. and S. with a lover's knot between. These were those of herself and her husband, and the ring was one she had seen him wear daily. Constance trembled in every limb; she felt a deadly paleness overspread her face, and the room in which she sat swam round her; but on recovering her self-possession, she said:

"Child, let me look at this ring."

The wondering boy placed in her hand the trinket, which she had not the slightest doubt of having seen years before in London.

"Who gave you this, my child?" she asked.

"My papa."

"Your papa!—what is your name?"

"Sidney."

"What else?" she asked impetuously.

"Sidney Warren Milton."

"Thank God! But how came you to be named so? There is some mystery in this—a mystery that must soon be solved now. Where were you born, dear little Sidney?"

"In Calcutta."

"What is your age, child?"

"Next year, I shall be seven years old."

"Seven—how strange it is that you have the name you bear!"

"It is my papa's," said the boy, with a little proud irritability of manner.

"Where did your papa live before he came to Calcutta?"

"I don't know—in many places—soldiers always do."

"He is a soldier?"

"My papa is Major Milton, and lives in the cantonments at Meerut."

"A little time, and I shall know all," replied poor Constance, caressing the boy with great tenderness.

On arriving at Meerut, however, she found herself ill—faint and feverish, so that for days she was confined to her bed, where she lay wakeful by night, watching the red fire-flies flashing about the green jalousies, and full of strange, wild dreams by day. She had but one keen and burning desire—to see Major Milton, and to learn from his lips the fate of her husband. On the evening of the fifth day—the evening of the 10th of May—she was lying on her pillow, watching the red sunshine fading on the ruined mosques, and Abu's stately tomb, when just as the sunset gun pealed over the cantonments, the *ayah* brought her a card, inscribed, "Major Milton—Staff Corps."

"Desire the Major to come to me!" said Constance in a broken voice, and terribly convulsed by emotion; for now she was on the eve of knowing all.

"Here to the *mehm sahib's* bedside?" asked the astonished *ayah*.

"Here instantly—go—go!"

Endued with new strength, as the woman withdrew, she sprang from her bed, put on her slippers, threw round her an ample cashmere dressing robe, and seated herself in a bamboo chair, trembling in every fibre. In a mirror opposite she could see that her face was as white as snow. The door was opened.

"Major Milton," said a voice that made her tremble, and attired in undress uniform, pith-helmet in hand, her husband, looking scarcely a day older, stood gazing at her in utter bewilderment. He gave one convulsive start, and then stood rooted to the spot; but no expression or glance of tenderness escaped him. His whole aspect bore the impress of terror.

Years had elapsed as a dream, and they were again face to face, those two, whom no man might put asunder. Softness, sorrow, and reproach faded from the face of

Constance. Her broad, low forehead became stern; her deep-set, dark eyes sparkled perilously, her full lips became set, and her chin seemed to express more than ever, resolution.

"Oh, Constance—Constance," he faltered, "I know not what to say!"

"It may well be so, Sidney" (and at the utterance of his name her lips quivered). "So *you* are Major Milton, and the supposed husband of Miss Dashwood?"

There was a long pause, after which she said:

"I ask not the cause of your most cruel desertion; but whence this name of Milton?"

"A property was left me—and—but of course, you have long since ceased to love me, Constance?"

"*You* actually dare to take an upbraiding tone to me!" she exclaimed, her dark eyes flashing fire. Then looking upward appealingly, she wailed, "Oh, my God! my God! and *this* is the man for whom, during these bitter years, I have been eating my own heart!"

"Pardon me, Constance; you may now learn that there is no gauge to measure the treachery of which the human heart in its weakness is capable. Yet there has been a worm in mine that has never died."

She wrung her hands, and then said, with something of her old softness of manner:

"You surely loved me once, Sidney?"

"I did." He drew nearer, but she recoiled from him.

"Then whence this cruel change?"

"Does not some one write, that we love, and think we love truly, and yet find another to whom one will cling as if it required these two hearts to make a perfect whole?"

"Most accursed sophistry! But if you have no pity, have you not fear?"

"I have great fear," said he in a broken voice; "thus, Constance, by the love you once bore me, I beseech you to have pity, not on me, but on my little boy, and his poor mother—preserve their happiness——."

"And sacrifice my own?" said she in a hollow voice.

"Spare, and do not expose me—my commission—my position here——."

"Neither shall be lost through me," she replied, in a voice that grew more and more weak; "but leave me—leave me—the air is suffocating—the light has left my eyes. Farewell, Sidney—kiss your child, for my sake."

He drew near to take her hand, but she repulsed him with a wild gesture of despair, and throwing up her arms, fell back in her seat, with a gurgle in her throat, her head on one side and her jaw fallen.

"Dead—quite dead!" was his first exclamation, and with his terror was blended a certain selfish emotion of satisfaction and relief at his escape. The blood again flowed freely in his veins, and he was roused by the cantonment *ghurries* clanging the hour of *nine*.

"Help—help!" cried he; but no help came, and as he hurried away, the sudden din of musket-shots, of shrieks and yells, announced that the great revolt had begun at Meerut, and that the expected massacre of the Europeans had commenced. In that butchery, those he loved most on earth perished, and midnight saw him, wifeless and childless, lurking in misery and alone in a mangotope, on the road to Kurnaul.

* * * * *

While listening to the narrative of my friend Sidney, whom I had always known as Warren, rather than Milton, the clock on the mantelpiece struck *nine*, and he said in a broken voice:

"It was at this very hour, twelve months ago, that my boy and his mother were murdered by the 3rd Cavalry, at the moment that Constance was dying!"

As he spoke, a strange white light suddenly filled one end of the smoking-room, and amid it there came gradually, but distinctly to view, two figures, one was a little boy with golden hair, the other a woman whose left arm was around him—a beautiful woman, with clearly-cut features, masses

of dark hair curling over a low, broad forehead, lips full and handsome, with a massive chin and classic throat—the woman of the veiled picture, line for line, but to all appearance living and breathing, with a beautiful smile in her eyes, and wearing, not the riding-habit, but a floating crape-like white garment, impossible to describe. There was a strange weird brightness in her face—the transfigured brightness of great joy and greater love.

"Constance—Constance and my child!" cried Sidney, in a voice that rose to a shriek; and like a dissolving view, the light, and all we looked on with eyes transfixed, faded away!

I was aware of an excess of sensitiveness, and that my heart was beating with painful rapidity. I did not become insensible, but some time elapsed before I became aware that lights were in the room, and that several servants, whom my friend's cry had summoned in haste and alarm, were endeavouring to rouse him to consciousness from a fit that had seized him; but from that fit he never recovered. His heavy, stertorous breathing gradually grew less and less, and ere a doctor came, he had ceased to respire.

His death—sudden as hers on that eventful night, but a retributive one—was declared to be apoplexy; but I knew otherwise. Since then, though the effect of the grape-shot wound on my nervous system has quite passed away, I feel myself compelled to agree with the hackneyed remark of Hamlet, that "there are more things in heaven and earth, than are dreamt of in our philosophy."

THE SPECTRE HAND.

Do the dead ever revisit this earth?

On this subject even the ponderous and unsentimental Dr. Johnson was of opinion that to maintain they did not, was to oppose the concurrent and unvarying testimony of all ages and nations, as there was no people so barbarous, and none so civilised, but among whom apparitions of the dead were related and believed in. "That which is doubted by single cavillers," he adds, "can very little weaken the general evidence, and some who deny it with their tongues confess it by their *fears*."

In the August of last year I found myself with three friends, when on a northern tour, at the Hotel de Scandinavie, in the long and handsome Carl Johan Gade of Christiania. A single day, or little more, had sufficed us to "do" all the lions of the little Norwegian capital—the royal palace, a stately white building, guarded by slouching Norski riflemen in long coats, with wideawakes and green plumes; the great brick edifice wherein the Storthing is held, and where the red lion appears on everything, from the king's throne to the hall-porter's coal-skuttle; the castle of Aggerhuis and its petty armoury, with a single suit of mail, and the long muskets of the Scots who fell at Rhomsdhal; after which there is nothing more to be seen; and when the little Tivoli gardens close at ten, all Christiania goes to sleep till dawn next morning.

English carriages being perfectly useless in Norway, we had ordered four of the native carrioles for our departure, as we were resolved to start for the wild mountainous dis-

trict named the Dovrefeld, when a delay in the arrival of certain letters compelled me to remain two days behind my companions, who promised to await me at Rodnaes, near the head of the magnificent Rans-fiord; and this partial separation, with the subsequent circumstance of having to travel alone through districts that were totally strange to me, with but a very slight knowledge of the language, were the means of bringing to my knowledge the story I am about to relate.

The table-d'hôte is over by two o'clock in the fashionable hotels of Christiania, so about four in the afternoon I quitted the city, the streets and architecture of which resemble portions of Tottenham Court Road, with stray bits of old Chester. In my carriole, a comfortable kind of gig, were my portmanteau and gun-case; these, with my whole person, and indeed the body of the vehicle itself, being covered by one of those huge tarpaulin cloaks furnished by the carriole company in the Store Standgade.

Though the rain was beginning to fall with a force and density peculiarly Norse when I left behind me the red-tiled city with all its green-coppered spires, I could not but be struck by the bold beauty of the scenery, as the strong little horse at a rasping pace tore the light carriole along the rough mountain road, which was bordered by natural forests of dark and solemn-looking pines, interspersed with graceful silver birches, the greenness of the foliage contrasting powerfully with the blue of the narrow fiords that opened on every hand, and with the colours in which the toy-like country houses were painted, their timber walls being always snowy white, and their shingle roofs a flaming red. Even some of the village spires wore the same sanguinary hue, presenting thus a singular feature in the landscape.

The rain increased to an unpleasant degree; the afternoon seemed to darken into evening, and the evening into night sooner than usual, while dense masses of vapour came rolling down the steep sides of the wooded hills, over which the sombre firs spread everywhere and up every vista that opened, like a sea of cones; and as the houses became fewer

and further apart, and not a single wanderer was abroad, and I had but the pocket-map of my "John Murray" to guide me, I soon became convinced that instead of pursuing the route to Rodnaes I was somewhere on the banks of the Tyri-fiord, at least three Norwegian miles (*i.e.*, twenty-one English) in the opposite direction, my little horse worn out, the rain still falling in a continual torrent, night already at hand, and mountain scenery of the most tremendous character everywhere around me. I was in an almost circular valley (encompassed by a chain of hills), which opened before me, after leaving a deep chasm that the road enters, near a place which I afterwards learned bears the name of Krogkleven.

Owing to the steepness of the road, and some decay in the harness of my hired carriole, the traces parted, and then I found myself, with the now useless horse and vehicle, far from any house, homestead, or village where I could have the damage repaired or procure shelter, the rain still pouring like a sheet of water, the thick, shaggy, and impenetrable woods of Norwegian pine towering all about me, their shadows rendered all the darker by the unusual gloom of the night.

To remain quietly in the carriole was unsuitable to a temperament so impatient as mine; I drew it aside from the road, spread the tarpaulin over my small stock of baggage and the gun-case, haltered the pony to it, and set forth on foot, stiff, sore, and weary, in search of succour; and, though armed only with a Norwegian tolknife, having no fear of thieves or of molestation.

Following the road on foot in the face of the blinding rain, a Scotch plaid and oilskin my sole protection now, I perceived ere long a side gate and little avenue, which indicated my vicinity to some place of abode. After proceeding about three hundred yards or so, the wood became more open, a light appeared before me, and I found it to proceed from a window on the ground floor of a little two-storeyed mansion, built entirely of wood. The sash, which

was divided in the middle, was unbolted, and stood partially and most invitingly open; and knowing how hospitable the Norwegians are, without troubling myself to look for the entrance door, I stepped over the low sill into the room (which was tenantless) and looked about for a bell-pull, forgetting that in that country, where there are no mantelpieces, it is generally to be found behind the door.

The floor was, of course, bare, and painted brown; a high German stove, like a black iron pillar, stood in one corner on a stone block; the door, which evidently communicated with some other apartment, was constructed to open in the middle, with one of the quaint lever handles peculiar to the country. The furniture was all of plain Norwegian pine, highly varnished; a reindeer skin spread on the floor, and another over an easy chair, were the only luxuries; and on the table lay the "Illustret Tidende," the "Aftonblat," and other papers of that morning, with a meerschaum and pouch of tobacco, all serving to show that some one had recently quitted the room.

I had just taken in all these details by a glance, when there entered a tall thin man of gentlemanly appearance, clad in a rough tweed suit, with a scarlet shirt, open at the throat, a simple but *degagé* style of costume, which he seemed to wear with a natural grace, for it is not every man who can dress thus and still retain an air of distinction. Pausing, he looked at me with some surprise and inquiringly, as I began my apologies and explanation in German.

"Taler de Dansk-Norsk," said he, curtly.

"I cannot speak either with fluency, but——."

"You are welcome, however, and I shall assist you in the prosecution of your journey. Meantime, here is cognac. I am an old soldier, and know the comforts of a full canteen, and of the Indian weed too, in a wet bivouac. There is a pipe at your service."

I thanked him, and (while he gave directions to his servants to go after the carriole and horse) proceeded to

observe him more closely, for something in his voice and eye interested me deeply.

There was much of broken-hearted melancholy—something that indicated a hidden sorrow—in his features, which were handsome, and very slightly aquiline. His face was pale and careworn; his hair and moustache, though plentiful, were perfectly white-blanched, yet he did not seem over forty years of age. His eyes were blue, but without softness, being strangely keen and sad in expression, and times there were when a startled look, that savoured of fright, or pain, or insanity, or of all mingled, came suddenly into them. This unpleasant expression tended greatly to neutralise the symmetry of a face that otherwise was evidently a fine one. Suddenly a light seemed to spread over it, as I threw off some of my sodden mufflings, and he exclaimed—

"You speak Danskija, and English too, I know! Have you quite forgotten me, Herr Kaptain?" he added, grasping my hand with kindly energy. "Don't you remember Carl Holberg of the Danish Guards?"

The voice was the same as that of the once happy, lively, and jolly young Danish officer, whose gaiety of temper and exuberance of spirit made him seem a species of madcap, who was wont to give champagne suppers at the Klampenborg Gardens to great ladies of the court and to ballet girls of the Hof Theatre with equal liberality; to whom many a fair Danish girl had lost her heart, and who, it was said, had once the effrontery to commence a flirtation with one of the royal princesses when he was on guard at the Amalienborg Palace. But how was I to reconcile this change, the appearance of many years of premature age, that had come upon him?

"I remember you perfectly, Carl," said I, while we shook hands; "yet it is so long since we met; moreover—excuse me—but I knew not whether you were in the land of the living."

The strange expression, which I cannot define, came over his face as he said, with a low, sad tone—

"Times there are when I know not whether I am of the living or the dead. It is twenty years since our happy days—twenty years since I was wounded at the battle of Idstedt—and it seems as if 'twere twenty ages."

"Old friend, I am indeed glad to meet you again."

"Yes, old you may call me with truth," said he, with a sad, weary smile as he passed his hand tremulously over his whitened locks, which I could remember being a rich auburn.

All reserve was at an end now, and we speedily recalled a score and more of past scenes of merriment and pleasure enjoyed together—prior to the campaign of Holstein—in Copenhagen, that most delightful and gay of all the northern cities; and, under the influence of memory, his now withered face seemed to brighten, and some of its former expression stole back again.

"Is this your fishing or shooting quarters, Carl?" I asked.

"Neither. It is my permanent abode."

"In this place, so rural—so solitary? Ah! you have become a Benedick—taken to love in a cottage, and so forth—yet I don't see any signs of——."

"Hush! for godsake! You know not *who* hears us," he exclaimed, as terror came over his face; and he withdrew his hand from the table on which it was resting, with a nervous suddenness of action that was unaccountable, or as if hot iron had touched it.

"Why?—Can we not talk of such things?" asked I.

"Scarcely here—or anywhere to me," he said, incoherently. Then fortifying himself with a stiff glass of cognac and foaming seltzer, he added: "You know that my engagement with my cousin Marie Louise Viborg was broken off—beautiful though she was, perhaps *is* still, for even twenty years could not destroy her loveliness of feature and brilliance of expression—but you never knew *why?*"

"I thought you behaved ill to her—were mad, in fact."

A spasm came over his face. Again he twitched his hand.

away as if a wasp had stung, or something unseen had touched it, as he said—

"She was very proud, imperious and jealous."

"She resented, of course, your openly wearing the opal ring which was thrown to you from the palace window by the princess——."

"The ring—the ring! Oh, do not speak of *that!*" said he, in a hollow tone. "Mad?—Yes, I was mad—and yet I am not, though I have undergone, and even *now* am undergoing, that which would break the heart of a Holger Danske! But you shall hear, if I can tell it with coherence and without interruption, the reason why I fled from society, and the world—and for all these twenty miserable years have buried myself in this mountain solitude, where the forest overhangs the fiord, and where no woman's face shall ever smile on mine!"

In short, after some reflection and many involuntary sighs—and being urged, when the determination to unbosom himself wavered—Carl Holberg related to me a little narrative so singular and wild, that but for the sad gravity —or intense solemnity of his manner—and the air of perfect conviction that his manner bore with it, I should have deemed him utterly—mad!

"Marie Louise and I were to be married, as you remember, to cure me of all my frolics and expensive habits—the very day was fixed; you were to be the groomsman, and had selected a suite of jewels for the bride in the Kongens Nytorre; but the war that broke out in Schleswig-Holstein drew my battalion of the guards to the field, whither I went without much regret so far as my *fiancée* was concerned; for, sooth to say, both of us were somewhat weary of our engagement, and were unsuited to each other: so we had not been without piques, coldnesses, and even quarrels, till keeping up appearances partook of boredom.

"I was with General Krogh when that decisive battle was fought at Idstedt between our troops and the Germanising Holsteiners under General Willisen. My battalion of the

guards was detached from the right wing with orders to advance from Salbro on the Holstein rear, while the centre was to be attacked, pierced, and the batteries beyond it carried at the point of the bayonet, all of which was brilliantly done. But prior to that I was sent, with directions to extend my company in skirmishing order, among some thickets that covered a knoll which is crowned by a ruined edifice, part of an old monastery with a secluded burial-ground.

"Just prior to our opening fire the funeral of a lady of rank, apparently, passed us, and I drew my men aside to make way for the open catafalque, on which lay the coffin covered with white flowers and silver coronets, while behind it were her female attendants, clad in black cloaks in the usual fashion, and carrying wreaths of white flowers and immortelles to lay upon the grave. Desiring these mourners to make all speed lest they might find themselves under a fire of cannon and musketry, my company opened, at six hundred yards, on the Holsteiners, who were coming on with great spirit. We skirmished with them for more than an hour, in the long clear twilight of the July evening, and gradually, but with considerable loss, were driving them through the thicket and over the knoll on which the ruins stand, when a half-spent bullet whistled through an opening in the mouldering wall and struck me on the back part of the head, just below my bearskin cap. A thousand stars seemed to flash around me, then darkness succeeded. I staggered and fell, believing myself mortally wounded; a pious invocation trembled on my lips, the roar of the red and distant battle passed away, and I became completely insensible.

"How long I lay thus I know not, but when I imagined myself coming back to life and to the world I was in a handsome, but rather old-fashioned apartment, hung, one portion of it with tapestry and the other with rich drapery. A subdued light that came, I could not discover from where, filled it. On a buffet lay my sword and my brown bearskin cap of the Danish Guards. I had been borne from the field

evidently, but when and to where? I was extended on a soft fauteuil or couch, and my uniform coat was open. Some one was kindly supporting my head—a woman dressed in white, like a bride; young and so lovely, that to attempt any description of her seems futile!

"She was like the fancy portraits one occasionally sees of beautiful girls, for she was divine, perfectly so, as some enthusiast's dream, or painter's happiest conception. A long respiration, induced by admiration, delight, and the pain of my wound, escaped me. She was so exquisitely fair, delicate and pale, middle-sized and slight, yet charmingly round, with hands that were perfect, and marvellous golden hair that curled in rippling masses about her forehead and shoulders, and from amid which her *piquante* little face peeped forth as from a silken nest. Never have I forgotten that face, nor shall I be *permitted* to do so, while life lasts at least," he added, with a strange contortion of feature, expressive of terror rather than ardour; "it is ever before my eyes, sleeping or waking, photographed in my heart and on my brain! I strove to rise, but she stilled, or stayed me, by a caressing gesture, as a mother would her child, while softly her bright beaming eyes smiled into mine, with more of tenderness, perhaps, than love; while in her whole air there was much of dignity and self-reliance.

"'Where am I?' was my first question.

"'With me,' she answered naïvely; 'is it not enough?'

"I kissed her hand, and said—

"'The bullet, I remember, struck me down in a place of burial on the Salbro Road—strange!'

"'Why strange?'

"'As I am fond of rambling among graves when in my thoughtful moods.'

"'Among graves—why?' she asked.

"'They look so peaceful and quiet.'

"Was she laughing at my unwonted gravity, that so strange a light seemed to glitter in her eyes, on her teeth, and over all her lovely face? I kissed her hands again, and

she left them in mine. Adoration began to fill my heart and eyes, and be faintly murmured on my lips: for the great beauty of the girl bewildered and intoxicated me; and, perhaps, I was emboldened by past success in more than one love affair. She sought to withdraw her hand, saying—

"'Look not thus; I know how lightly you hold the love of one elsewhere.'

"'Of my cousin Marie Louise? Oh! what of that! I never, never loved till now!' and, drawing a ring from her finger, I slipped my beautiful opal in its place.

"'And you love me?' she whispered.

"'Yes; a thousand times, yes!'

"'But you are a soldier—wounded, too. Ah! if you should die before we meet again!'

"'Or, if you should die ere then?' said I, laughingly.

"'Die—I am already dead to the world—in loving you; but, living or dead, our souls are as one, and——."

"'Neither heaven nor the powers beneath shall separate us now!' I exclaimed, as something of melodrama began to mingle with the genuineness of the sudden passion with which she had inspired me. She was so impulsive, so full of brightness and ardour, as compared to the cold, proud, and calm Marie Louise. I boldly encircled her with my arms; then her glorious eyes seemed to fill with the subtle light of love, while there was a strange magnetic thrill in her touch, and, more than all, in her kiss.

"'Carl, Carl!' she sighed.

"'What! You know my name?—And yours?'

"'Thyra. But ask no more.'

"There are but three words to express the emotion that possessed me—bewilderment, intoxication, madness. I showered kisses on her beautiful eyes, on her soft tresses, on her lips that met mine half way; but this excess of joy, together with the pain of my wound, began to overpower me; a sleep, a growing and drowsy torpor, against which I struggled in vain, stole over me. I remember clasping her

firm little hand in mine, as if to save myself from sinking into oblivion, and then—no more—no more!

"On again coming back to consciousness, I was alone. The sun was rising, but had not yet risen. The scenery, the thickets through which we had skirmished, rose dark as the deepest indigo against the amber-tinted eastern sky; and the last light of the waning moon yet silvered the pools and marshes around the borders of the Langsö Lake, where now eight thousand men, the slain of yesterday's battle, were lying stark and stiff. Moist with dew and blood, I propped myself on one elbow and looked around me, with such wonder that a sickness came over my heart. I was *again* in the cemetery where the bullet had struck me down; a little grey owl was whooping and blinking in a recess of the crumbling wall. Was the drapery of the chamber but the ivy that rustled thereon?—for where the lighted buffet stood there was an old square tomb, whereon lay my sword and bearskin cap!

"The last rays of the waning moonlight stole through the ruins on a new-made grave—the fancied fauteuil on which I lay—strewn with the flowers of yesterday, and at its head stood a temporary cross, hung with white garlands and wreaths of immortelles. Another ring was on my finger now; but where was she, the donor? Oh, what opium-dream, or what insanity was this?

"For a time I remained utterly bewildered by the vividness of my recent dream, for such I believed it to be. But if a dream, how came this strange ring, with a square emerald stone, upon my finger? And *where* was mine? Perplexed by these thoughts, and filled with wonder and regret that the beauty I had seen had no reality, I picked my way over the ghostly *debris* of the battle-field, faint, feverish, and thirsty, till at the end of a long avenue of lindens I found shelter in a stately brick mansion, which I learned belonged to the Count of Idstedt, a noble, on whose hospitality—as he favoured the Holsteiners—I meant to intrude as little as possible.

"He received me, however, courteously and kindly. I found him in deep mourning; and on discovering, by chance, that I was the officer who had halted the line of skirmishers when the funeral *cortége* passed on the previous day, he thanked me with earnestness, adding, with a deep sigh, that it was the burial of his only daughter.

"'Half my life seems to have gone with her—my lost darling! She was so sweet, Herr Kaptain—so gentle, and so surpassingly beautiful—my poor Thyra!'

"'*Who* did you say?' I exclaimed, in a voice that sounded strange and unnatural, while half-starting from the sofa on which I cast myself, sick at heart and faint from loss of blood.

"'Thyra, my daughter, Herr Kaptain,' replied the Count, too full of sorrow to remark my excitement, for this had been the quaint old Danish name uttered in my dream. 'See, what a child I have lost!' he added, as he drew back a curtain which covered a full-length portrait, and, to my growing horror and astonishment, I beheld, arrayed in white even as I had seen her in my vision, the fair girl with the masses of golden hair, the beautiful eyes, and the *piquante* smile lighting up her features even on the canvas, and I was rooted to the spot.

"'This ring, Herr Count?' I gasped.

"He let the curtain fall from his hand, and now a terrible emotion seized him, as he almost tore the jewel from my finger.

"'My daughter's ring!' he exclaimed. 'It was buried with her yesterday—her grave has been violated—violated by your infamous troops.'

"As he spoke, a mist seemed to come over my sight; a giddiness made my senses reel, then a hand—the soft little hand of last night, with my opal ring on its third finger—came stealing into mine, unseen! More than that, a kiss from tremulous lips I could not see, was pressed on mine, as I sank backward and fainted! The remainder of my story must be briefly told.

"My soldiering was over; my nervous system was too

much shattered for further military service. On my homeward way to join and be wedded to Marie Louise—a union with whom was intensely repugnant to me now—I pondered deeply over the strange subversion of the laws of nature presented by my adventure; or the madness, it might be, that had come upon me.

"On the day I presented myself to my intended bride, and approached to salute her, I felt a hand—the *same hand*—laid softly on mine. Starting, and trembling, I looked around me; but saw nothing. The grasp was firm. I passed my other hand over it, and felt the slender fingers and the shapely wrist; yet still I saw nothing, and Marie Louise gazed at my motions, my pallor, doubt and terror, with calm, but cool indignation.

"I was about to speak—to explain—to say I know not what, when a kiss from lips I could not see sealed mine, and with a cry like a scream I broke away from my friends and fled.

"All deemed me mad, and spoke with commiseration of my wounded head; and when I went abroad in the streets men eyed me with curiosity, as one over whom some evil destiny hung—as one to whom something terrible had happened, and gloomy thoughts were wasting me to a shadow. My narrative may seem incredible; but this attendant, unseen yet palpable, is ever by my side, and if under any impulse, such even as sudden pleasure in meeting you, I for a moment forget it, the soft and gentle touch of a female hand reminds me of the past, and haunts me, for a guardian demon—if I may use such a term—rules my destiny: one lovely, perhaps, as an angel.

"Life has no pleasures, but only terrors for me now. Sorrow, doubt, horror and perpetual dread, have sapped the roots of existence; for a wild and clamorous fear of what the next moment may bring forth is ever in my heart, and when the touch comes my soul seems to die within me.

"You know what haunts me now—God help me! God help me! You do not understand all this, you would say.

Still less do I; but in all the idle or extravagant stories I have read of ghosts—stories once my sport and ridicule, as the result of vulgar superstition or ignorance—the so-called supernatural visitor was visible to the eye, or heard by the ear; but the ghost, the fiend, the invisible Thing that is ever by the side of Carl Holberg, is only sensible to the touch—it is the unseen but tangible substance of an apparition!"

He had got thus far when he gasped, grew livid, and, passing his right hand over the left, about an inch above it, with trembling fingers, he said—

"It is here—here now—even with you present, I feel her hand on mine; the clasp is tight and tender, and she will never leave me, but with life!"

And then this once gay, strong, and gallant fellow, now the wreck of himself in body and in spirit, sank forward with his head between his knees, sobbing and faint.

Four months afterwards, when with my friends, I was shooting bears at Hammerfest, I read in the Norwegian "Aftenposten," that Carl Holberg had shot himself in bed, on Christmas Eve.

THE GHOST OF LAWFORD HALL.

A True Story.

It is now about thirty years ago that I and my husband, not long after our marriage, went on a visit to Lawford Hall, an old house near Rugby, which I had long desired to see. I remember I posted alone from Coventry, near which town we had been staying, as my husband had gone on two days before to attend some county races, where the Lawfords were running a favourite horse, and to go hunting the next day with the old baronet. At the last Warwickshire house in which we had been staying, I had picked up one wet day, in the library, an old book of trials which contained allusions to Lawford Hall. For three hours in a cozy nook of that old Elizabethan room—where Vandyke's cavaliers seemed longing to come out of their frames to talk to you—I sat absorbed over a strange and terrible poisoning case which had made all Warwickshire shudder sixty years before. There are days when the brain seems unusually sensitive to impressions; and all the details of this crime, from some reason or another, became printed, or, I may rather say, photographed on my retina, with a sharpness and vividness that was almost painful. I saw the great plumed bed where the rich man lay: again the thin Hogarthian figure of the younger step-brother, in the old costume, stole with silent foot through the shadow of the broad oak staircase, and past the curtained-bed to the mantelpiece where the long row of bottles stood. I saw the thin trembling white hand, with the lace ruffle all but covering it, remove half the contents of one phial and substitute the laurel water, that he had dis-

tilled, with cruel care, in his own locked-up room. I heard the dreadful cry of the dying man as his step-brother bent over him. I could hear the ringing hoofs of the doctor's horse as it came racing up the Rugby Road. I could see the grave face of the man in black as he stood by the bedside, and, raising the cold waxen head let it fall again, uttering only those few solemn words, "It is too late; he is dead." Then I followed the surgeon down to the wainscoted parlour, where the murderer with hypocritical grief told his planned story of the cause of his brother's fit, and with subtle craft evaded any examination of the body. I tracked the poisoner to the quiet autumn garden, where he eyed with a bitter smile, as he passed, the laurel from whence he had picked the fatal leaves. I heard him stop and tell with exultation the old gardener, who was resting on his spade, "that it would be easy days with the old servants now, not as in Sir Edward's time, and that he had long worked to be master of Lawford Hall, and was so at last." I watched him tremble when the letter came from his brother's friend, sternly and coldly desiring that the body should be examined; step by step, indeed, I followed that soft-spoken, decorous, cat-like, cruel villain, till I left him with irons round his small wrists, while the mourning coach was preparing that was to take him to the Warwick gibbet, still lying, still unrepentant, still denying, in spite of the countless proofs of guilt that from earth, water, and air, had been drawn to cover him with shame. I saw him also in the dead of the night previous, when the grim keepers were asleep, steal from his pillow, throw himself on his knees, so seldom bent to God, and unite his thin fettered hands in passionate prayer to the Judge of all, and I hoped that even at that last moment he had found mercy.

These scenes again rose in my mind as, after hours of heavy rain, the sun shone out just as the post-chaise swept round a turn of the road, past Newbold, into Little Lawford. The light glittered on the yellowing leaves of the lime trees and flickered upon the wet gables of the old house. It was

a stately, melancholy building, half Tudor half classic, and the huge Elizabethan porch contrasted unpleasantly with the ugly square windows of the Georgian era, that were rendered more hideous by the picturesque oriels that here and there were left. There was a solid comfort about the heavy stone mullions that the flimsy modern window-sashes of Dutch invention could not touch, and I regretted that the old house had been so awkwardly patched. Just to the right of the porch there was an old Tudor window that especially struck my eye. It was overhung with a Virginian creeper, whose leaves were already turning scarlet. The moment I glanced at that window, a scene of the old trial came again into my thoughts. It was below that room that the poisoner stood that April morning and called, in his gay, careless way, to his sister, to ask her if she was ready for the ride before breakfast. She had just been to her brother's room to give him the fatal medicine, and had left him as she thought asleep. The window opened on a passage between her room and that of the murdered man, and she heard her brother call to her as she passed back from the one room to the other. "I shall be ready in a quarter of an hour," she called from the window, upon which he went to the stable, mounted his bay mare, which was already saddled, and rode off to the Wells. Five minutes after the sister returned to her brother's room, and found him in the agonies of death.

As the postchaise swept round the drive to the front entrance, I observed on the right the dial court, of which I had read, with the great iron gates, leading into the garden. It was there the poisoner had stood, the night he distilled the laurel water, talking to two tenants who had come to see his sick brother. Stately as the house was, guarded by its avenue of limes and girt with its broad gardens, I could not help fancying that a curse still rested upon it. There was a malign, unhappy look about it that weighed on my too active imagination, so that a curious presentiment of some impending evil came over me, as the great bell, dragged

from its socket, gave forth a clamorous jangling clang, that seemed to echo through endless passages with a querulous clamour that I thought would never cease.

* * * * *

The dinner was dull. Lady Lawford, whom I had found so delightful, so charming, so vivacious at Paris, seemed oppressed with the social difficulties of her county position, and to be unequal to the task of entertaining alone a gathering of such local pomposities. Some secret trouble, some sorrow, seemed to have fallen upon her. She had an absent manner, and often relapsed into embarrassing silences. The local doctor, the local solicitor, the rector, two or three old maids, and some shy country squires' daughters, were all that she had to amuse; but still she failed to amuse them. The Meet had been a long way off, and my husband and hers were not expected till late. Once or twice during dinner she rather alarmed me, by mentioning the dangerous country they would that day ride over. S[illegible]hoped all was safe. We ladies were just rising to go, to the evident delight of the doctor, the rector, and the solicitor, when we heard a sound of voices in the hall, a scuffling, and then a groan. At that moment Sir Edward Lawford, in a soiled scarlet coat, entered hurriedly, looking rather pale and anxious, and with one arm in a sling.

"Mr. Dobson," said he to the doctor, who instantly pricked up his ears, "we want your help at once. A poor fellow has been thrown, and a good deal hurt."

Then seeing me, his face grew graver; he advanced to me and offered his hand. "My dear Mrs. H——," he said, "you mustn't be alarmed, but your husband has been thrown in trying a gate; his shoulder is put out, and one of his ribs I'm afraid of—but it will be all right directly."

I remember no more; they told me afterwards that I fainted. By nature I was strong-nerved, but from Sir Edward's manner I formed an immediate notion that my husband was dangerously injured, and so indeed it proved.

* * * * *

It was a week before my husband was out of danger. He had dislocated his shoulder and broken two ribs, besides receiving a painful injury on his knee cap. I watched him day and night, and gave him myself the narcotics that were required to give him the necessary sleep, for a neuralgic affection attended some of the contusions, and a low fever followed, to allay which rest was indispensable.

It was the ninth day, if I remember right, that, pale, anxious, and exhausted by want of sleep, I came for the first time since my husband's accident to take my doleful seat at the dinner table. Sir Edward was very frank and cordial, untiring in his attentions to me, and in his sympathy for me.

"Most unfortunate!" he said, "and just at the beginning of the hunting season too—at the end one would not care—and I was so anxious to show him how straight our set here rode. Tell him, poor fellow, when he gets better, that we've had to shoot Nepa—she'd broken her leg just above the fetlock—but I'd rather have shot all my stud than have had him bowled over like that."

"There is no danger now, I assure you," said the everlasting country doctor, who seemed perennial at Lawford Hall banquets. "I assure you on my honour, as a professional man, if he is only careful, and we can keep up this artificial sleep without injury to his sanguineous circulation and his digestive organs."

"Ah! this riding, like the driving of Jehu, the son of Nimshi, Sir Edward," said the equally perennial rector, "is very much on the increase with our country aristocracy, and is likely, I fear, to be attended with most terrible casualties. Where do you get your Moselle, Sir Edward?"

The inevitable old-maid sisters uttered their usual exclamations whenever the accident was alluded to, of "Shocking—shocking! Oh, dear, it is dreadful to think of!"

I bore it as long as I could, but that vast evening—a century in itself—was no bad preparation to a year at the hulks. O, that never-ceasing sonata of Beethoven, beaten

out with remorseless exactitude by the rector's conscientious daughter, oh! the weariscmeness of that strictly scientific rubber at which I assisted as in a dream. At last the playing grew sleepier and sleepier; Sir Edward, tired with foxhunting, fell asleep as the cards were being shuffled, and I gave an internal three times three when the servant announced the first carriage, and Lady Lawford said:

"Well, I think we're all getting sleepy together; so perhaps we'd better go to bed."

Could this be the Lady Lawford I had known in Paris, I thought, as I mounted the old oak staircase, and, with a half-alarmed look at my own shadow, entered the long corridor, in which our room was the only one inhabited. A miserable visit it had been. If past trouble weighed upon the house, was the shadow of that crime to cast a gloom upon the race for ever? I could not account for the change in people I had known so gay and pleasant, and I puzzled myself in vain to invent a reason. Extravagant I might have expected to find them, their life a ceaseless whirl of excitement; but careworn, humdrum—it seemed impossible. One would really have thought that Sir Edward's father had been the murderer, instead of some grandfather's cousin, who had left no children. Oh, that George was well! I thought, that we could get away from this dreadful place.

I uttered these words aloud as I opened the bed-room door, so loud that I almost thought they might have waked George; but there he lay, in a deep sleep, breathing heavily, and with one bandaged arm resting upon the counterpane. There was no lamp lit in the room, but a cheerful wood fire blazed in the grate, and merry shadows danced upon the ceiling. The medicine-bottles were drawn up in a ghastly rank and file on the mantelpiece, and the careful servant had left jelly and meat essence, and some fruit, ready for my use on a side-table.

I threw myself into a great carved chair that stood by the fire, and listened to my husband's breathing. There was no sound but that and the measured ticking of an old

A COACHFUL OF GHOSTS.

THE STORY OF A NOBLE HOUSE IN THE REIGN OF TERROR.

I.

"MONSIEUR LE VICOMTE DE MAURY." This announcement made one evening in January, 1792, at the outer drawing-room door of the Château de Grou, had rather a singular effect on six well-bred people who were sitting there.

The old Marquise, enthroned in a high armchair beside the yawning chimney with its wood-fire, made an exclamation, and threw a half-fierce, half-laughing glance at her son the Marquis, who started up from the table where he was playing backgammon with his wife's cousin, the Chevalier de Mazan. The younger Marquise, a thin, precise-looking woman of five-and-forty, pinched her mouth up into its most forbidding expression, and raised her eyes with a frown from the tapestry-frame over which she and her daughter-in-law, the Comtesse de Grou, were bending and blinding themselves. The Comte, seeing his father's hasty movement, got up too from his chair in the background, and came forward one or two steps with a dignified slowness which was in itself a reproof to his perturbed relations.

There was no time to say or do anything. The visitor, welcome or not, walked forward into the room and met these six pairs of eyes, curious, angry, contemptuous, cold, astonished, haughty. Not one friendly look, not one sign of welcome. The visitor's cheeks, already ruddy from the cold air outside, took a deeper shade as he exchanged formal bows with the inmates of this inhospitable salon. His ap-

pearance at least did not deserve such a reception. A handsome, spirited-looking young man, a head and shoulders taller than the other gentlemen present, with one of those expressive faces that give unprejudiced people an instant feeling of liking and confidence. At the Château de Grou, however, M. de Maury was regarded as an enemy, for several reasons, and it was not without hesitation that the old Marquise brought herself to treat him as an equal, and politely motioned him to a chair.

"Sit down, monsieur, I beg of you," said she. "You are out late this evening, but perhaps it is the fashion. It is long since I lived in Paris, and I do not know what they do there now."

"Pardon me, madame, for appearing at such a strange hour," said M. de Maury. "But, as you may imagine, it is only an affair of the greatest importance that has brought me here at all."

"Indeed! And to what do we owe this unusual honour?" said the Marquise blandly.

"Madame, it is—it may be—a matter of life and death."

"Is it possible? Before we come to anything so serious, may one ask for the last news from Paris? I should not care to leave the world in a state of ignorance. What are your good friends the patriots doing now, monsieur?"

"There is no special news this week, madame. It is still disturbed, of course, but the people will calm down in time. If the Constitution we have made is allowed to work, we shall have peace and prosperity, in which all our past confusion will be forgotten."

"Then, monsieur, we shall all have to pray for bad memories," said the Chevalier.

"What is your saint, your hero, doing? M. de Lafayette —what do you call him—Motier?" said the Marquis, laughing. "By-the-by, let me apologise for my ill-trained servants, who gave you your title at the door. The fact is, monsieur, I forget who you are. Citoyen——."

"Bernard Lavigne," said the young man, smiling a little.

"One must be willing to sacrifice empty distinctions at the wish of the nation. But, monsieur—let me ask you—was anything great and sublime ever done without a touch of absurdity in the doing it?"

"Perhaps not; but one wants the sublimity to excuse the absurdity," said the Marquis. "And to speak candidly, I have seen absurdities enough, and horrors enough, in these last two years; but my very strongest spectacles have not availed to detect the sublimity."

"There is something sublime on the tapis now, however," said the old Marquise. "A matter of life and death. Will Monsieur de Maury break it to us before he enters on the subject of Monsieur de Lafayette?"

"Madame," began Bernard, with a little hesitation.

His eyes wandered once or twice round the room, as if to reassure themselves of something.

"Do not disturb yourself," said Madame de Grou. "All our hearts are strong enough to bear bad news. At least, I can promise that you will see no weakness."

The Vicomte bowed.

"A report has reached us, madame," he said, "that you are thinking of emigration. It has spread itself in the town and in the neighbouring villages. People say that you mean to drive away in state in your large coach with all your household, without any attempt at concealment. Mesdames et messieurs," he went on, rising from his chair, and looking earnestly round on all the dimly-lit faces, "believe what I say, and do not distrust me. In the present state of people's minds, you cannot attempt anything more dangerous. Your carriage will not be allowed to pass. Seeking liberty, you will find yourselves in prison. I warn you honestly, and as a friend."

There was a moment's pause after the young man had spoken.

"And, as a friend, what would you advise us to do?" said the Marquis.

"Ah, cher monsieur, thank you a thousand times! Will

you indeed trust me, and take my advice? Then let me implore you to stay here, and not to think of emigration. You are comparatively safe here. There are still some who respect you. And my father's influence will do a great deal for your protection. Ah, let me hear that you have given up all thoughts of this mad and dangerous scheme."

The Chevalier glanced at the Comte and laughed a little sneeringly, as he leaned over the backgammon board. The Marquis smiled too.

"And this is your new French liberty!" he said. "A man cannot drive away from his house in his own carriage without being stopped and imprisoned. Curious, truly!"

"One has not far to seek for an explanation in this case, my dear Marquis," said the Chevalier de Mazan, nodding his head with a side glance at M. de Maury. "In fact, you may take it as a general rule that, where the people rise unexpectedly, they are egged on to it by some person superior in birth to themselves—some person with a motive. But such persons are too apt to spoil their own game by a lurking wish to stand well with all parties."

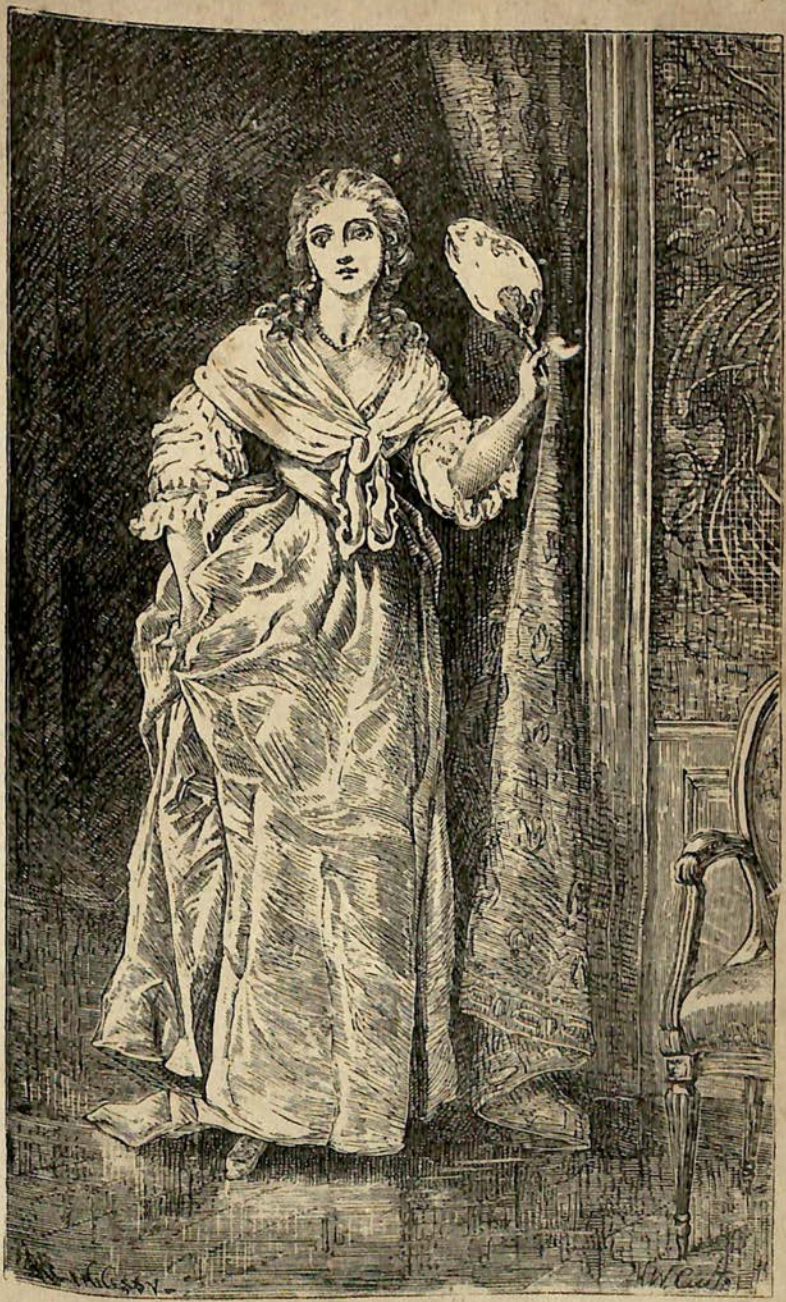
Monsieur de Mazan was generally considered the genius, the wit, and the wise man of the family. Everybody hung upon his words, smiled, and looked to see how they were taken by the object of them.

"I am glad to think," said Bernard, "that Monsieur de Grou does not share in the vile suspicions of monsieur his cousin. He has known me too long——."

"And have I had any reason to increase my esteem with my knowledge?" said the Marquis, with a little bow.

The young man was about to answer, when an appearance at the door which separated the salon from another room beyond checked the words upon his lips.

A girl, dressed in white, very slim and graceful, with a small fair face and large frightened blue eyes, stood still in the tapestry-framed doorway, and gazed at him. His low bow seemed to bring her back to herself. She answered it with a sweeping courtesy, and glided round with light steps



A girl dressed in white.

on the polished floor, behind the two younger Mesdames de Grou and their frame, to a corner behind the old Marquise's chair.

"Have you brought me my fan, Léonore?" said the old woman.

"Here it is, madame," said the girl, in a low voice, putting it into her hand.

But while she spoke and moved she never took her eyes away from the Vicomte de Maury, who stood opposite to her with his face to the whole circle. Her entrance seemed to silence them all for a moment. The Chevalier still smiled, with a snake-like contentment, keeping his black eyes fixed on Bernard; but the Marquis looked a little disturbed, and his face twitched angrily.

The young Comtesse de Grou, a weak, impatient-looking little person, glanced up at her husband, who was standing near her, with an expression which said, "Finish this scene, for pity's sake!" And the Comte, stepping forward with a Louis-Quatorze air, ventured to ask M. de Maury whether they might expect any further information.

"I have warned your family of their danger, monsieur," replied Bernard quietly, "and I still hope, not without avail. I must endure your suspicions, which I might have expected. I am happy to know that there is one person, at least, who will not share in them."

"Never, never!" came a quick half-whisper from behind the Marquise's chair.

Bernard bowed gratefully.

"Allons, this is too much!" said the Chevalier, in a low tone, to M. de Grou. "Will you complete this business, or must I?"

But the old Marquise was doing it for them.

"Adieu, then, monsieur," she said, rising. "We beg to offer you our thanks. If your warning is founded on fact, we probably shall never meet again. I would only ask you to use your influence and that of monsieur votre père to make our stay in prison as short as possible."

M. de Maury bowed low, and walked out of the room. The Marquis waved his son back, and followed him himself.

"Listen to me a moment, mon cher," he said, drawing him aside in the ante-room. "I believe myself that you are honest in your way. But you see you are in bad odour with De Mazan and the ladies. He is jealous of you, and they are all on his side."

"Pardon, monsieur—not *all*, or where would be his jealousy?"

"Ah! I did not count the demoiselle herself. But listen: I will give you a chance, on my own responsibility. Emigrate with us. Trust yourself to that same dangerous coach. When we are safe over the frontier, you can quarrel with De Mazan—shoot him, if you like—and then you have your chance."

"You are very good, monsieur, but my lot is cast in with France. As to that coach—if you would but believe the danger!—ah, let me at least save mademoiselle your niece!"

"It is impossible," said the Marquis, turning away. "I have given my word to De Mazan. I cannot break it if I would."

"What horror, what barbarity! To sacrifice such a life——."

"Let us say no more. Some one is coming. I thank you for your good intentions. Adieu, adieu!"

The Marquis de Grou tripped back into the salon, looking quite old and grave, and the Vicomte de Maury left the château.

II.

Mdlle. Léonore de Grou d'Isambert was an important person in her family. Her father had married—an unusual step for a younger son, and, what was more extraordinary still, had made a love-match with—the heiress of the Isamberts, thus possessing himself of a fine château and a large estate, and becoming quite independent of his own people. But he did not long enjoy his good fortune. He

and his wife both died young, and their one child was taken charge of by her grandmother, the old Marquise de Grou.

Léonore was a quiet timid girl, and her submission to the stately, severe, domineering old lady was unusually complete and unquestioning, even for that country and that time. She was to marry M. de Mazan, a cold-hearted man of the world, more than twenty years older than herself. Clever, well-bred, aristocratic, an altogether delightful person, said the De Grou chorus whenever he was mentioned. Only the little Marquis sometimes held his peace: there were one or two points on which he differed with his wife's brilliant cousin. Nothing that signified, of course; only slight doubts whether it was really possible to be cruel, grasping, ungenerous, and yet hold the front rank among gentlemen.

No regular contract had yet been made between M. de Mazan and Mdlle. d'Isambert, but everyone understood that the match was to be, and approved of it. Those fine estates could not be in better hands than the Chevalier's. His connection with the family was also an advantage. Léonore was already eighteen, and the marriage might have taken place before this had it not been for the great disturbances in France, which had are straining effort on the Chevalier's eagerness.

Her château was near Paris, in the thick of the Revolution; and he thought it might be as well to wait for quieter times, and not to hamper himself just now with a young unwilling bride. Her family would take care that she did not escape him.

And this emigration scheme would take her away from the influence of young Bernard de Maury. His father, the Comte de Maury, the De Grou's nearest neighbour, had never been very friendly with them, having a way of considering his humanity before his nobility, quite against all their traditions. But till within the last year or two Bernard had been a frequent guest at the Château de Grou; the Marquis liked him, and an old childship friendship between him and Léonore had advanced into something not the less

sweet because it was hopeless, and because in its language there were few spoken words.

Even now Bernard was not without his allies in the château, though perhaps they were not very powerful ones. There was an old woman, Pernette Flicquet by name, who had been nurse to Mdlle. d'Isambert, Léonore's mother, and to Léonore herself. It was in her charge that Léonore had come from Isambert to Grou, after her mother's death.

Pernette's daughter Jeanneton had also come in the suite of the little demoiselle, and not long after had received permission from the Marquis to marry Luc Bienbon, a garde-chasse of M. de Maury's. Pernette had at once established herself in antagonism to the old Marquise, who often threatened to turn her off, but always ended by granting a contemptuous forgiveness, knowing that the sharp, plain-spoken, republican old woman was almost indispensable to Léonore.

"Allez!" said Madame de Grou, "Pernette talks all the nonsense you can imagine, but she is good at heart. Who cares for her and her tongue? Let her stay."

If Pernette and her daughter could have poisoned M. de Mazan, and given their young lady to Bernard de Maury, they would have been troubled with few scruples. But the great Grou household was too much for them, and till now they had only grumbled.

The preparations for driving off in the family coach went on quite openly. The ladies superintended the packing of their wardrobes, and Pernette, with sour acquiescence, received the Marquise's order to get ready Mdlle. d'Isambert's best gowns and jewellery.

"Hé!" said Pernette, "a fine present for the nation! Madame is determined it shall have everything. Now if I had my will, we should bury a few chests in the courtyard."

"For you to dig up when we are gone, my good Pernette?" said Madame de Grou.

"As madame pleases. But where mademoiselle goe certainly I go," answered Pernette coolly.

"What! You mean to venture yourself in this dangerous coach? Seriously, have you heard any of these reports—that we shall drive ourselves straight to the guillotine? Or is it all in Monsieur le Vicomte de Maury's imagination?"

At that moment Pernette's heart was softened towards the old lady, who seemed to appeal to her as a friend, looking at her with eyes full of human anxiety, but not a touch of fear.

"Madame la Marquise knows what those dogs of villagers are," said she. "I have only heard from my daughter what her husband says—that it is a great danger. M. le Vicomte has more sense than most of these gentlemen. He knows what he is talking about."

"But we do not trust him," said the Marquise, shaking her head. "He and his father are false and dishonourable. Go, Pernette, do as I tell you, and send mademoiselle to me."

"Ah, these poor nobles!" said Pernette, as she trotted off to do her duty. "I have but half a heart for the patriots. But if we can save the sweetest of them all, the others must go their own way."

Certainly the household had no lack of warnings. During the next day or two, the dogs of the château howled almost unceasingly; the Grou ghost, a white flying figure, who used sometimes to sweep with a rustle of wings and garments over the head of any one who found himself benighted outside the walls, was suddenly endued with a voice, and screamed and sobbed at night round the towers like an Irish Banshee: so the story goes.

Mdlle. d'Isambert had a strange and rather terrible dream, which she told to Pernette, and also to her grandmother. They both laughed; but the dream left its impression, and had its consequence.

"Madame," said Léonore to the Marquise, "I dreamed that the large coach with the six brown horses was drawn up yonder, under our windows, on the green beyond the moat."

"And why not at the door?" said Madame de Grou.

"Indeed I do not know. It stood there, and you were all

getting in. *I saw you, one by one, as I looked out of my window—you, my aunt, my uncle, my cousins, and Monsieur le Chevalier.*"

"And not yourself? That was droll enough."

"I was in my room—the door was locked and the window was barred, so that I could not get out. Ah, how terrified I was! I called to you, but you did not hear. I ran up and down the room; I shook the door; I tried to squeeze myself through the bars of the window. I thought I was left alone in the château—you had all forgotten me. The coach moved off round the grass—it was night, you know, and there were lanterns burning, and I saw frost sparkling on the ground. Then I tried again and pushed myself through the bars, and clambered down the wall through the ivy—I do not know how. Then I ran through the cold wet grass and overtook the coach just as it turned to go down the hill. I sprang to the door and held on with both hands, and cried out to you to take me in. Ah, now comes the frightful part of the dream! The people in the coach—they were not you—it was full of GHOSTS—*strange luminous forms, through which I saw their skeletons.* Heavens! what a terrible sight! I fell backwards into the grass; and then I awoke."

For once Léonore forgot her awe of her grandmother, crouched down by her side, and hid her face against her stiff satin gown. Madame de Grou looked down at her with a smile of mixed affection and contempt.

"A wonderful dream, truly!" said she. "But it has not been the custom of our family to dream terrors any more than to feel them. However, my dear Léonore console yourself. Your safety is very important; and when we emigrate, you certainly will not be forgotten or left behind. Foolish girl, have a little more courage, and learn to laugh at your dreams. Stand up: there is some one coming."

"Shall you tell the others, madame?" asked Léonore, rising to her feet.

"I certainly shall not repeat such absurdities," answered

Madame de Grou. "And if you must have your terrors, pray keep them to yourself."

The young Comtesse came tripping into the room, to ask some question of her grandmother; and Léonore, who was not fond of her cousin, withdrew into a window, and looked out across the wintry landscape. The château stood high perched on a hill, with woods behind, and a broad slope of park-land, crossed by avenues, dividing it from the little town of Grou, which crept and established itself up the sides of the valley. Behind the long blue ridge opposite was the village of Maury and its château, smaller and less important than Grou, but held for many centuries by a race without any stain upon their name, foremost always in the wars and councils of the province. But now they were traitors to their order; and if a lady of Grou let her eyes wander across the faint smoke and dark roofs in the valley to those heights beyond, which always caught the last western sun, it would have been an insult to suppose that her well-trained thoughts could stray as far as the Château de Maury.

III.

It had never been the custom of the lords of Grou to shut their gates against anybody: they were far too proud to be suspicious. Thus there were peasants going in and out of the courtyard at all hours, and thus Luc and Jeanneton were able to pay as many visits as they pleased to their good mother Pernette.

On one of those days of suspense, before any attempt was made to carry out the emigration plan, at about five in the evening, Léonore was sitting in the window of her own room. She had escaped from the salon half an hour before, and had been trying to strengthen and console herself by reading the *Imitation*, but now the fast-fading light obliged her to lay the book down. Her long white fingers were folded over its brown cover, and her face was turned towards the window.

The sky was very clear, but the landscape was already

shrouded in twilight: nothing was plainly to be seen but the ridge of distant hills, which could only bring sad thoughts to her mind. In the pale, unconscious, immovable face there was a desolate resignation; at eighteen Léonore had nothing to hope for; her fate was fixed; even a wish was wrong and forbidden.

She would hardly have confessed what it was that she wanted; after all, her life was like the lives of all other French young ladies. And if it was not arranged quite to please her, why, was it not right to give up one's own will? was this world ever a happy place? Certain high precepts of the book she had been reading were in her mind as she sat, and made her ashamed of her discontent, but a little more despairing too; how could she ever reach such heights of willing self-denial?

"My pretty one will be perished, sitting here," said the voice of old Pernette. "And she will lose all her senses if she dreams too much over that book of madame's."

"It is a very beautiful good book, Pernette," said Léonore, slowly rousing herself, and turning her blue eyes from the window to her old nurse's anxious withered face.

"That may be," said Pernette. "I can't read, as mademoiselle knows, and I am quite contented. I never saw anything but sighs and frowns come from reading those books. Madame la Marquise is always in a demon of a temper after she has done her reading. Mademoiselle has the temper of an angel, on the contrary, but she will make herself sad and dismal, and that is all the worse for her poor servants. Now she is not in a good-humour, and I came to beg her to do something for me."

"What is it, then, Pernette? My humours make no difference to you," said Léonore, smiling very sweetly.

"Mademoiselle, my daughter Jeanneton is in the garden at the foot of the turret-stairs. She has a special message which she will give to no one but our little princess herself. Will she be wrapped up in this great cloak, and go down to speak to poor Jeanneton?"

"Why could not she come here?" asked Léonore. But she got up, and Pernette hastily put the cloak round her shoulders.

"Dame, she was in a hurry. She had a reason of her own, ma petite."

Mademoiselle d'Isambert, accustomed to trust her old nurse implicitly, followed her out of the room and down a winding staircase, which opened by a little turret-door into a corner of the garden between the walls and the moat. A few evergreens made a shelter, and close by there was a bridge of planks laid over the moat for the convenience of the servants, who were thus able to take the shortest way to the village.

Jeanneton, in her high starched cap, jacket and short petticoats, was standing on the grass outside the turret-door.

"What have you to say to me, Jeanneton?" said Léonore's low sweet voice in the doorway.

"Would mademoiselle step outside? There was a person who—wished to speak to her—," stammered the femme Bienbon—la Bienbonne, as her neighbours called her.

"Quick, petite!" whispered Pernette. "Yonder—in the shadow of those bushes! It is an affair of life and death!"

Though Léonore was timid, she was by no means a coward, and she stepped down from the doorway and glided across the grass, like a slender ghost in the twilight, till she reached the bushes that Pernette pointed out to her. A man was standing there, withdrawn in the shadow. He started forward and kissed her hand.

"Ah, monsieur, is it you?" exclaimed Léonore, under her breath.

"Do not be angry with your poor friend, mademoiselle. Léonore, you know me very well. You trust me, do you not?"

"You need not ask that."

She raised her pale face, looking at him wistfully. Her own strong feelings had suddenly driven out all thought of the proprieties, of her stern grandmother, of the Chevalier, of

the stiff and horrified circle at the château. Her ruling thoughts now were of pride in her lover and joy in his presence. He was so different from all the other gentlemen she knew, with his frank manners and generous instincts. To compare him with M. de Mazan, it was indeed "Hyperion to a satyr;" but Léonore's devout comparison was of the Archangel Michael to his great adversary.

One need hardly say that, for anything either of them knew, it might have been a warm summer evening when they stood there under the bush. But after a minute or two a little of the girl's anxious timidity came back to her.

"Is it safe for you to be here?" she whispered. "Why did you come?"

"Léonore, first, will you do as I ask you? Promise me that."

"Ah, if I could, mon ami; but I dare not! It is very wicked of me to be here now. But you know those women cheated me. And I am not really sorry, for I longed to thank you for coming that night to warn us, like a good true friend."

"Then they have not changed their plans? It is still to be THAT TERRIBLE COACH?"

"O yes; and I think it will end in our all dying. I dreamt of it—"and she shivered—"I won't tell you my dream, though you would not laugh at it as my grandmother did. But are you angry, Bernard, that I cannot make you that promise? What did you want me to do? I will do it if I can."

"Let me take you away with me, now, into safety. You must consent. If you care for me in the least, you will."

"And leave the others to their fate?" she said, after a moment's pause.

"It is the fate they have chosen for themselves," he answered passionately. "Why should these people, in their obstinate running on death, be allowed to drag you with them? It is a horror—an unheard-of tyranny! If you can refuse me now, you never loved me! Come, my angel."

"How is it that you can save me, and not them?" said Léonore, holding back from him.

"Because you will be safe at Maury. My father will welcome you as his daughter. And the people have no rage against you—how could they have? But in such times the innocent go with the guilty. You will come with me?"

"Do not ask me—I cannot!"

"Ah, then, pardon my mistake! I had a foolish notion that you cared for me, mademoiselle," said Bernard, setting his teeth, and beginning to walk away.

"Bernard, stay! If my life would save yours, you would soon see—— What am I saying? Be patient, and listen to me. I am very miserable; but one's duty must come first—you always used to think so. How could I leave my grandmother to go through this danger alone? I have belonged to her all my life—how could I steal away and desert her now like a coward? I always was stupid and cowardly; I know it very well. But this thing I will not do, it is too dishonourable. I am bound to my family, and I must stay with them. Ah, let us both try and bear it bravely. Go away and forget me: that is the best thing you can do."

"Then you will stay here and forget me?" said De Maury.

Léonore shook her head, while her tears ran fast.

"Well, my queen, my fairy, my crowned saint," he said, suddenly falling on one knee, "this I swear to you! If you will not save yourself, you shall be saved! You are not angry with me for that? But as to your anger, I see I must risk it."

"If you run yourself into danger for my sake, I shall indeed be angry.—Ah, Jeanneton, what is it?"

"Mademoiselle, Madame la Marquise is coming upstairs!"

"Heavens! Adieu, Bernard! If she knew of this, she would kill me!"

M. de Maury watched the white flying figure cross the grass and dart in at the tower-door. Then he pulled his

slouched hat over his face, and slowly and carefully left the precincts of the château. He almost forgot his disappointment, on his way down the hill, in the necessity of making fresh plans. And whatever future dangers and difficulties might be, it was inspiriting to find how thoroughly worthy she was—this gentle timid maiden of Grou—of a brave man's devotion.

IV.

THE next afternoon a family council was held in the salon. Léonore, who had not been called to it, was sitting by the wood-fire in her grandmother's large room, busy with some embroidery, when her cousin, the young Comtesse, came in and joined her. She walked up to the fire and stood there shivering.

Léonore had never had much sympathy with this youngest of the Mesdames de Grou, whose ways were often those of a child without its attractiveness; but now, lifting her eyes to her face, she saw there something quite new. The Comtesse was flushed and agitated, and was looking down at her cousin with a tearful, trembling nervousness.

"What is it, ma cousine?" said Léonore. "Have you been in the salon? What have they decided?"

"Something dreadful!" said the Comtesse. "I declare to you, if I live through this night, it will be only to die of terror afterwards. Yes, I know I ought to be ashamed of myself. You may well look surprised; you thought you were the only coward in the house—at least, our grandmother always says so. But here is another to keep you company."

"What is it all about?" said Léonore.

"We start to-night, child—imagine! Figure to yourself what a terrible scene it will be! AND THE COACH IS NOT TO COME TO THE DOOR, BUT TO BE DRAWN UP ON THE GREEN YONDER; and we shall drive away by the cart-road into the country, so as to avoid the town altogether. Madame

Grandmother and Xavier de Mazan have arranged it all. What do you think of it? To me it seems a detestable plan; but what is my little voice! M. de Grou, of course, obeys his mother, and Madame de Grou has no opinion at all; and François never will disagree with Xavier; so there we are. But if you chose to speak to Xavier, it might make some difference."

"My dear, you are quite mistaken. I am nobody."

Léonore had laid her needle down, and was gazing at the red logs. The short afternoon would soon die away into twilight; then would come the evening, AND THEN LIFE OR DEATH! The Comtesse stood beside her cousin, a strange contrast to Léonore's dreamy grace, with her stiff little figure, high heels, and mountain of thickly-powdered hair.

"But why do you dislike this plan so much?" said Léonore, without looking up.

"O, because I hate the dark," said the Comtesse petulantly. "I am afraid of it, I tell you, and all the horrid flashing lights; I think it is much more dangerous than daylight. So cold too. I wish we could stay here. I don't believe any one would hurt us. They would be a set of ungrateful monsters if they did. Tell me the truth now, Léonore: do you think we shall be allowed to pass?"

"I don't know—no, I think not."

"Then it will be the fault of those odious De Maurys."

The little Comtesse quailed before the angry flash of her cousin's eyes, generally so soft and timid.

"You have no right to say a word against them! If they could save us, we should be safe, though certainly we have not deserved anything from them. De Maury—if nobility went by worth, theirs would be the noblest name in France."

The Comtesse shrugged her shoulders, threw up her hands, and laughed.

"Well, Léonore, that is very fine, my dear child. You are quite enthusiastic. But if one may venture to advise you, don't let Xavier de Mazan hear anything like that."

"I do not care what he hears; it makes no difference to

me," said Léonore. "If one must die, must give up all, it is at least a blessing to have known something good and noble on earth."

"Mon Dieu, my cousin," said the Comtesse more seriously, "is it right for a demoiselle to talk in this way? I assure you one might almost imagine that you were in love with that young De Maury. But I will not be so unkind as to repeat what you say. Only pray take care, and control yourself a little."

"Why should I hide it, especially now?" said Léonore, looking up into her cousin's face with shining eyes, but without any change of colour or variation of voice. "If you have found it out for yourself, so be it. I love him with all my heart! And I would rather die to-night than escape safely out of the country and be married—ah!"

Her voice suddenly failed, and she hid her face in her hands, with something between a groan and a cry.

"Léonore, you freeze me with horror!" said her cousin. "Heavens! is it possible that I should have lived to hear such words from a relation—from a demoiselle de Grou? You feel shame, do you not? You well may. Unwomanly, degraded! I cannot believe my ears! The girl must be mad!"

"No," said Léonore. "But I have told the truth, perhaps for the first time in my life, and I am glad of it."

"And I am sorry," said the Comtesse, with dignity, "to find you so unworthy of your name. I will try to forget what you have said, unfortunate girl. A year hence, if we live, you will be thankful to me for not reminding you of it."

A rustle, and a few measured taps upon the boards, told Léonore that her cousin was leaving the room. She sat still, with her face hidden, cold and stiff with a misery too great for tears. After some time she heard a distant bustle in the château, and sounds of her grandmother returning. In her present state of mind, feeling unable to meet her, she left her frame there by the fire, and went through her own room and up some steps into a little room in the turret,

where there was no furniture but a table, a prie-dieu chair and a crucifix on the wall.

Here, in summer, Léonore was accustomed to spend a good deal of her time; no heat could penetrate those old white walls, and only at a certain time in the morning did the sun force his way through the ivy veil of the single loophole-window, and throw a tender garland of leafy shadows round the crucifix. But now the little room was very cold, and already in twilight. Léonore knelt down, hoping presently to feel stronger and calmer. Then she would go to her grandmother, and once more entreat her to take Bernard's advice, and give up this wild scheme. Perhaps she might listen; if not, by to-morrow at this time where might they not be?

V.

LEONORE knelt on, her forehead bowed upon the chair, her clasped hands stretched out and drooping forward. The sun was gone down, the hills of Maury had lost their last rosy tints, and the stars were beginning to come out; but it was quite dark in the little oratory, and her prayers had passed insensibly into dreams. At first they were peaceful and pleasant ones, but after a time they changed, and her terrible dream of a few nights before came back to her with more than its first horror: THE COACH DRAWN UP IN THAT STRANGE PLACE—an idea which Madame de Grou had, indeed, boldly utilised—her own agony and terror at being left behind; her escape down the wall; HER OVERTAKING THE COACH AND SEEING THE GHOSTS, WHO NOW SEEMED TO STRETCH OUT THEIR LONG RATTLING HANDS TO SEIZE HER AND DRAG HER IN AMONG THEM—it was all too terrible, and Léonore awoke screaming, and found herself cold, weary, faint, and trembling on her knees in the turret-room.

She had no means of knowing the time, but felt sure that she had slept there for hours, it was so very dark and cold. Getting up with difficulty, she moved to the door and tried to open it, but could not succeed; it seemed to be fastened

on the outside. Then she knocked, and called "Pernette" in a voice that seemed to refuse to be heard, feeling all the time as if she was dreaming on still; and then, as there was no answer, she sat down where she had been kneeling before, and leaning her chin on her hands, gazed up at the narrow window. Through its thick greenish glass she could just discern one star, large and bright, looking in upon her in her loneliness, and suddenly bringing to her mind what Bernard had said the evening before, "If you will not save yourself, you shall be saved." She had not thought much about that; it seemed so impossible: she must submit to the same fate as her relations, and no one could save her from it. Still the words roused an instinct of life in her weary mind: she no longer thought she was dreaming, and began to wonder what they were all doing, how she was to get out, whether they had all gone away hours ago, and left her behind. No, that could not be.

Then she noticed some strange shadows and flashes of light which were falling now and then on the arched stone sides of that window, and glimmering on the glass. Sounds began to reach her ears—a rattle of harness, a creaking of wheels, a buzz of many voices. Léonore sprang to her feet, full of a new waking terror of being left behind. Could her grandmother have forgotten her, after all, and Pernette too? Might the door have been locked by mistake, and would she be left here to starve?—for there was no scrambling out of that window, as in her dream! That would be more dreadful than the guillotine. Again she knocked on the door, called, listened, but could hear nothing, and felt sure that the door at the foot of the stairs must be fastened as well as this. The reality was more dreadful than any dream. Locked up and forgotten! The peasants would perhaps burn the château, and there would be no escape for her, unless by any chance Bernard knew that she was still there, and came to look for her. Ah, it was too terrible!

She stood shivering in the dark, and did not know what to think or what to do. After watching the lights and

shadows on the window as they flashed and fell, an idea occurred to her: she might at least see what they meant. She dragged and pushed the heavy table underneath the window, lifted the chair upon it, and so managed to climb up on the deep sloping window-sill. Clasping the bar with one hand, she opened the window with the other, and plunged it among the frosted ivy-leaves, tearing them from their stalks and scattering them. Then, bending her head forward, she could see the green beyond the moat, and on it a dark mass under a sky of stars, with torches flickering and men crowding about it. It was the Marquis's great coach! The harness-chains rattled, as the horses stamped and tossed their heads, but feet of horses and men were silent on the grass, and Léonore, looking down at them, shivered with cold, for the scene was like a wild unearthly dream. The people seemed to be in great haste, running backwards and forwards between the coach and the side-door of the château. Presently the servants stood aside, two advancing with flaring torches in their hands, and six people, two-and-two, came stepping carefully across the grass to the coach-door.

Léonore could not see their faces, but she knew each one well. First, the old Marquise and her son; then the younger Marquise and her son the Comte; then the Comtesse and the Chevalier de Mazan.

Léonore leaned forward as far as she could, and waved her hand into the frosty darkness, crying out in a voice that trembled and failed,

"Madame, are you going away without me? I am locked up here: you are leaving me behind!"

Perhaps the voice was hardly strong enough to reach her grandmother's ear; yet the old Marquise stopped suddenly and turned back from the coach-door as she was about to get in. There was a pause, a little hurried talk among the group of Léonore's relations. But their momentary hesitation was soon over; to the girl's amazement they got into the coach one after another, the servants drew back, the

postilions cracked their whips, and with many a groan and rumble the great vehicle moved off round the grass in the direction of a rough cart-road into the country, by which they hoped to escape any pursuit.

It was Léonore's dream, REPEATED FOR THE THIRD TIME, only she was a prisoner, and reality, fortunately for her, would not let her even try to overtake them. She still clung to her window till the last sound of the coach was lost in the distance, and even afterwards; for, tiring as her cramped posture was, it at least gave her a sight of the stars, and of the dim world on which they were shining. She clung there till another sound rose slowly on her ears—the angry roar of a crowd coming up from the village. They came nearer and nearer, crowding up the hill, till she could see the flare of the torches they carried, and hear their voices, which seemed to die away into a low resolute growl as they approached the château. But a few words were carried to her by a light cold wind which swept over their heads, and then rustled the leaves beside her window:

"FIRE, FIRE! BURN THE WILD BEASTS IN THEIR DEN!"

Léonore felt her brain reeling, and her senses failing suddenly. She let herself slip from the window-sill to the table, and then to the floor, where she fell down heavily and lay still.

VI.

MADEMOISELLE D'ISAMBERT woke from her fainting fit to find herself outside the château, on the edge of the moat, in the dark shadow of those same trees and bushes under which she had met her lover the evening before. He was beside her now, supporting her head on his arm, and her hair and face were wet with the cold water that he had been splashing over her. Cold it was indeed, for the moat was partly frozen, but perhaps it answered his purpose all the better.

"Léonore," he whispered, "keep yourself perfectly still. We are in great danger, but I shall save you. Can you stand up? I am afraid to let you lie on this grass."

With the instinct of obedience that seldom failed her, she rose at once, and stood leaning on her arm. But the things she had seen were not to be forgotten, even in the peace and safety of his presence.

"THEY ALL WENT AWAY IN THE COACH," she whispered, "AND LEFT ME BEHIND. Did my grandmother forget me? O, what could it mean?"

"Patience! You will know all some day; and your grandmother will be glad too," said Bernard, his voice trembling a little as if he was deeply moved.

"Are they safe, do you think? I wonder why she went without me. I wish I knew. What are all those people doing out there? They have not burnt the château yet?"

"No. When they are gone, I will take you away to a safe place."

Bernard stood quite still, holding her fast, and listening intently to all the strange noises that broke upon the beautiful night, the hoarse voices, the tramping feet, the wild laughter and cries of triumph, inside and outside of the whole building. Lights were flashing in the windows, and many of the mob were busy destroying and pulling to pieces the stately rooms; but many, too, were waiting outside for something, and presently a horrid yell announced that it was coming. The Vicomte de Maury knew very well what it was, and drew his rescued treasure a little closer. To her it was still like a dream; only now, under all the terror, there was a vague sense of happiness.

Slowly rumbling along the uneven road, heavy wheels were approaching the château. The horses' feet could not be distinguished from the tramp of many men that accompanied them. It was with a certain frightful solemnity, worthy of the Great Revolution, that THE MARQUIS DE GROU'S COACH WAS ESCORTED BACK TO HIS OWN DOOR. From their hiding-place Bernard and Léonore saw it come slowly up, saw the crowd part to receive it, saw it stop where it had stopped before, and, by the lights that were glaring and flickering all about, saw the door opened, and THOSE

SIX PEOPLE MADE TO DESCEND. Not that any force was necessary, for each one of them, even the little Comtesse de Grou, stepped out with as calm and proud of grace as if he or she were arriving at Versailles, instead of drawing nearer to the guillotine. Only the old Marquise, as her son gravely offered her his hand to walk into the house, waved him back and turned towards the mob with an air of fearless command.

"Where is that old traitress, Pernette Flicquet? Can any of you tell me? What has she done with my granddaughter, Mdlle. d'Isambert?"

She waited a moment, but met with no answer, and the Marquis, taking her hand, led her once more across their old threshold.

"Ah, let me go to her! I must, I must!" exclaimed Léonore.

"No, Léonore, you shall not," said Bernard de Maury.

She was half fainting again, and the strong young man lifted her in his arms like a child, and carried her across the moat by the plank-bridge, down the hill and across the valley to his father's house, while all the good patriots of the neighbourhood were occupied in sacking the Château de Grou, before escorting its owners away

To Prison and the Guillotine!

The one that was saved of that doomed family found herself a prisoner too, but her gaolers were the Vicomte de Maury, old Pernette, and Jeannoton. It was not till many days after that terrible night that she was calm and well enough to listen to the history of how it all happened.

Of course she had been locked in the oratory by friendly hands. The departure of the coach had been hurried on by a rumour which came up that evening from the village, that the people of Grou, led on by a patriot from the nearest large town, would be at the château in an hour's time. The coach was ordered round at once, the last arrangements were hurried through, and only just before starting did the

Marquise discover that her granddaughter was missing. The turret-door was locked, and the key had disappeared. Pernette too was nowhere to be found.

The Marquise declared at first that nothing would induce her to start without Léonore; but all the rest of her family were of a different opinion, and even the Chevalier could not see any reason for sacrificing six valuable lives.

Then the little Comtesse had stepped forward, and had said in the hearing of them all: "I do not think you need disturb yourself, madame. Léonore has probably escaped to Maury. It was only this evening that she confessed to me her love for M. le Vicomte." After this the Marquise seemed half stunned, and made no further resistance to going with the rest.

When the coach had driven off, Pernette came out of the cupboard hidden with tapestry, where she had sat and listened, admitted M. de Maury at the turret-door, and guided him to the room where they found Léonore insensible: THUS SHE WAS SAVED IN SPITE OF HERSELF.

* * * * *

The grandchildren of Madame la Comtesse de Maury, *née* de Grou d'Isambert, tell this story to their friends as they show them the old château, still grand, though defaced and half ruined by its experiences of revolution. And then, as we stand looking out on the green parterre beyond the moat, which is now drained and planted as a garden, a fair young Léonore de Maury, with the large frightened blue eyes of her grandmother, looks at us and says, in suddenly lowered tones, "AND—WILL YOU BELIEVE ME?—TO THIS DAY, ON FROSTY MORNINGS IN JANUARY, ONE SEES THE TRACES OF A COACH AND SIX UPON THE GRASS OUT THERE."

It seems impossible to doubt her word, but English love of evidence makes us ask the young lady if she has seen these spectral impressions herself. Up go her pretty hands, shoulders, and eyebrows, in despair at our incredulity.

"Mais oui! certainement!"

And after that, what is one to say?

GEORGE VENN AND THE GHOST.

We had been sitting round the fire, rather late at night, some half dozen of us, talking about ghosts, as people will talk sometimes on winter nights over the fire. We had none of us apparently anything very new to say upon the subject. We were only dealing with tales told at second hand; matters we had heard from others or read of in books; no one pretended to have undergone any personal experiences in connection with ghosts. One man had narrated a curious story touching an apparition said to have been seen by his grandfather; another had to tell about a house, alleged to be haunted, which had at one time been occupied by his uncles. We did not seem to get any nearer to the spirit world than this. We had only "hearsay" testimony to offer: no evidence bearing upon the question that would have been listened to for a moment in a court of law.

Of course some of our number had been talking a great deal more than the rest. In conversation, as in racing, there are always a few who make all the running, while the rest are content to come in anyhow. But, to continue the figure, it isn't always those who start off with the lead that manage to keep it; their pace slackens, and they drop back, and occasionally some from quite the rear show very respectably in front at the finish.

There was a lull. The talkers had rather exhausted their subject; they had perhaps no great stock of it on hand to draw from. One of our number, who had been sitting a little apart, and somewhat silent, then rose from his chair and approached the fire. With the tongs he lifted a red-

hot coal from the grate, and began deliberately to light his pipe. Somehow it happened that as he did this simple thing we all watched him without speaking, as though deeply interested in his movements. Our conversation, I suppose, had inclined us to lay an absurd stress upon trifles. We had started with rather a light treatment of our theme, and had at no time professed to attach much faith to the various recitals that had been ventured upon concerning supernatural visitations; but gradually, and perhaps unconsciously, we had become more and more held and possessed by our topic. We did not derive strength and support from our numbers, for each man seemed to communicate his weakness to his neighbour: we rather awed and influenced each other, and had at last wrought our nervous systems up to such a pitch of "receptivity," that I believe any sudden loud knocking at the door, or the fall of any article of furniture, or the winking or quenching of the gaslights, would have occasioned us very acute alarm. In this state of morbid impressibility we looked on raptly intent while George Venn went through the business of lighting his pipe with a hot coal.

"I don't think—you fellows—know much what—you're talking about," he said, breaking up his observation into little pieces, as it were, by the interjection of puffs from his pipe. He had at all times a habit of speaking calmly and slowly, almost solemnly. Upon the present occasion he was more than ever deliberate, and seemed somehow to force upon us an air of waiting breathlessly for his oracular utterances. "For all—you've been saying—it doesn't seem to me—that any of you—have really seen—a ghost. Now I HAVE!"

He spoke these last words loudly, and rather imperiously, I thought. He had a deep bass voice, somewhat hollow in tone. Upon the present occasion it seemed to me to possess almost a sepulchral quality. For a moment the hot coal lit up his face with a peculiar red glow; then he enveloped himself in quite a cloud of smoke, through which he stalked

back to his chair, all eyes following him with earnest curiosity, and perhaps some apprehension.

I think it must have occurred at the same moment to the other men in the room as well as to me that, all things considered, perhaps George Venn was the most likely of any of us to have been favoured with personal experiences in relation to the world of ghosts. This idea might have been due to the fact that less was really known about him than about the others, most of whom had been intimately connected with each other from quite schoolboy times, whereas Venn was comparatively a recent acquaintance. He was older than the rest, with a more decided manner; was somewhat taciturn, while we were inclined to be talkative; with no affectation of being *blasé*, he was apt to maintain a deliberate serenity while our spirits were at their highest and wildest—was, indeed, especially quiet and calm when we were most boisterous. But at the same time it must be said of him, that if he never yielded to our exhilaration, so also he never was deeply affected by our depression; and we had the usual juvenile propensity of oscillating with exceeding rapidity between ecstatic joy and abject despondency.

No one knew much about Venn. He was an artist, he had passed the greater part of his life abroad, and was now perhaps thirty years old or so. Within the last few years he had settled in London, and had gradually been introduced into the small group of men—art-students for the most part, and intimate friends—who were now assembled round the fire talking about ghosts. Though we were bound by no rules, and our meetings were the result of little pre-arrangement, and were irregular and accidental enough, we formed, in truth, a sort of club of young men, bound together by similar pursuits and inclinations. We met in each other's studios from time to time, talked art, smoked pipes, discussed each other's achievements and aspirations, had a turn now and then with the gloves or a bout with single-stick, and emptied tumblers of punch. We were decidedly young men, as you will perhaps have already con-

cluded from this report of our proceedings; and we gladly opened our ranks to admit George Venn. He was older, more experienced, was clever, good-tempered, and could give us valuable information about the methods and manners of continental art and artists. Moreover, the fact that he presented a type of character dissimilar to the general was in itself an urgent reason for his acceptance amongst us with promptness and goodwill.

Yes, decidedly I thought he was the very man to have seen a ghost. The more I considered him, the more I grew fixed in that opinion. Who should have seen a ghost if George Venn had not? That calm manner of his, which nothing seemed to affect—that settled repose, from which nothing could rouse him—those deep, yet hollow tones—those steady, earnest, dark eyes of his—all pertained appropriately to a man who had, it may be, looked into the other world, and was not, therefore, to be startled by the incidents of this—who was, as it were, *en rapport* with the supernatural, and therefore little likely to be affected by the normal occurrences of life. If a stranger of ordinary capacity had been introduced into the room at that moment, and asked to select from among us the man who had seen a ghost, I felt positive that he would have singled out George Venn. The pretensions of the others in such respect were contemptible, compared to Venn's.

Not that his appearance was remarkable, otherwise than by a simplicity of toilet that was perhaps a little studied We, after the manner of young art-students, were a little prone to eccentricities of dress, to certain fanciful exuberances in our modes of arranging our hair, training our moustaches, and shaping our beards. (We did not all possess those last-named appendages; all, however, affected a growth, more or less downy in quality and slight in quantity, upon the upper lip.) But Venn, if he had ever been subjected to such weaknesses, had now, at any rate, outgrown and got rid of them. He never appeared in the picturesque, brightly-lined, many-buttoned velvet painting-

jackets which were favourites with us. He wore generally a simple suit of tweed, and looked rather as though he were going shooting or on a pedestrian expedition than merely to work at his easel. In fact he never seemed to *pose* himself as a painter, whereas I think we were fond of attitudinizing a good deal in that character. He had possibly passed through that first stage of excited pride in his profession to which the student is prone. He wore no beard whatever, shaving close; though, to judge by the blue-black shades about his chin and lips, he might, had he so listed, have indulged in hirsute decoration on a most liberal scale. His hair was clipped close, the forelock drooping a little over his broad forehead, something after the fashion made memorable by the First Napoleon. Indeed, now I come to think of it, Venn had a good deal of the straight-ruled brow, the olive complexion, the sunken but steady eyes, and the regularity of feature of the great Emperor. Perhaps, upon the whole, his face was a little more aquiline in mould; while his figure, without being less broad, was taller, and more lithe and sinewy; and he was without the tendency to corpulence which spoilt the contour of *le petit caporal*, especially as he advanced in life.

"You've seen a ghost, Venn?" some one asked. "Really?"

"I have," he answered, simply.

"Where?"

"In this studio."

We received this announcement with quite a gasp of astonishment.

I should have said, perhaps, that we were sitting in Venn's painting-room. We had a habit of meeting now at Frank Ripley's, now at Tom Thoroton's, now at Venn's, now at my studio. There was no settled plan about the thing, no precise invitation issued; but at times a sort of understanding seemed to pervade our small society that on a particular night Frank, or Tom, or George, or Harry, as the case might be, would be in his rooms "at home," when men were expected "to look him up" accordingly. Some-

how the information circulated rapidly amongst us. We were too intimate to stand upon much ceremony with each other. No one waited for any further or more official intimation on the subject, but, when the night arrived, forthwith proceeded to his friend's abode, with unquestioning acceptance of the idea that he would find a host prepared to give him welcome. So it happened that it was in Venn's studio, on Venn's chairs, round Venn's fire, that we met on the evening under mention, smoking Venn's tobacco, drinking Venn's grog, and talking about ghosts in the manner already alluded to.

Now there was this to be said about Venn, that he never did anything quite as anybody else would do it. His arrangements in connection with the practice of his profession were differently ordered to those of other students. We were for the most part content with furnished apartments, improvising as convenient studios as we could; Venn had taken a whole house to himself.

"After all, it costs very little more," he one day explained in his quiet way, "while the advantages are enormous. Sometimes I like to be quiet, very quiet; with other people living in the house, you know, that's not possible. Occasionally it happens that I prefer to be noisy, particularly noisy: it occurs to me that I want to ascertain whether I've lost my aim, whether my nerve is steady, and my eye correct; and then I blaze away with my revolver at a mark on the wall for hours, sometimes for days together; or, feeling a passion for exercise, I pile up my furniture, and amuse myself with taking a flying leap over it, or jumping down a whole flight of stairs, coming down sometimes rather loudly and heavily, I can tell you. Other lodgers in the house might reasonably object to that kind of thing. They could no more stand me than I could tolerate them, in fact. We should never agree. We could never come to terms as to being noisy or quiet at quite the same times. In fact, I've tried life in lodgings, and found it a dead failure. The landlady always came up to give me notice to quit just as I

was thinking of going down to let her know that I couldn't endure to stop under her roof any longer. So now I'm on a different plan. I've a house of my own. A man's house is his castle. This is my castle—Venn Castle, if you like; and I can do what I like in it; play the drum or the organ, or leap-frog; fire off anything, from a popgun to an Armstrong; be as quiet as a mouse or noisy as Verdi's orchestra; and there's no one to interfere with me or say me nay. It's a capital good house; wants a great deal doing to it, I admit; in fact, it's terribly out of repair; but then that makes it cheap. I've got it for the fag end of a lease: the landlord won't do anything until the lease falls in; and of course no reasonable—I was going to say no respectable—tenant would take a place upon which he had to spend no end of money to make it decently habitable, especially as he couldn't be certain of having his term renewed. But I'm not particular; it suits me very well. I don't mind cracked ceilings, or broken cornices, or uneven floors; and so long as there are stairs, I don't think banisters matter much; for cobwebs, I'm rather partial to them, and we all know that dirt is picturesque. So here I've pitched my tent, and I shall get on well enough if I can only persuade the public to buy my pictures. After all, that's the main desideratum of an artist's life."

Certainly it was a queer old place, was Venn's Castle, built at a time when London houses were allowed a little more elbow room than at present. The rooms were large and numerous, the entrance wide; it belonged to the days when there were "halls," real halls, and not "passages" merely; the staircase solid and spacious, ascending gently, with large landings, and wooden globes at the corners of the banisters. The house was situate in a street near Soho Square, and had been once the abode of wealth and fashion, no doubt, but these had long since departed, leaving few traces behind them. "Venn's Castle" was shouldered by public-houses and hucksters' shops; the neighbourhood had sadly lost caste, and consideration, and money too, I should

think. Decidedly it had a very down-at-heel, out-at-elbow, impecunious, insolvent look. The scavengers didn't do their duty by the street, nor the paving commissioners, if there are such functionaries, nor the gas companies. It was always muddy, the roadway most uneven, and the lamps few and far between, emitting the feeblest of rays. Poverty had taken possession of the precinct, and was left to have its own way, to do its best or its worst there, undisturbed and unassisted. Proceeding to Venn's, you felt sure that you were entering a district certain to be described in parliamentary and registrar-general reports as "thickly populated and very poor." The evidence was clear on the subject: to be quite satisfied, you had only to look aloft at the number of birdcages, at the pigeons perched on the coping-stones or the chimney stacks, at the vermilioned flower-pots, the bright-green mignonette boxes upon the window-sills, or below at the mangles, to be arrived at down the area steps, and the clothes hanging up to dry in the areas; or all round at the coal-sheds, the beer-shops, the numberless bells on the door-posts, and zinc plates on the doors. And then the tide of children that flooded the streets and broke into waves on the kerb-stones; the children for ever singing shrill choruses, or performing wild dances, or playing strange games, very noisy, and dirty, and ill clad, and bareheaded, wanting, perhaps, fresh air and more food, and yet apparently very happy and high-spirited notwithstanding! Arriving at Venn's door, it was always necessary to break the ranks of a brigade of children drawn up in very close order, and holding possession of the steps against all comers. Having reached the knocker, and obtained entrance into the house, the brigade instantly re-formed in your rear, as though effectually to prevent your retreat by the same road. A thorough conviction must have occupied the minds of the juvenile population that to them belonged, by the right of long custom, Venn's doorsteps a great deal more than to Venn, and that if there was any permission required in the matter, he had to seek such permission of them rather than they of him.

"You've seen a ghost in this studio, Venn?"

"Certainly I have."

Now if Venn was a likely man to have seen a ghost, it was not less clear that Venn's studio was the very place of all others in which a ghost—from all one had ever read or heard by tale or history of ghosts—would be likely to make its appearance. It was a large room, so large that it seemed hardly possible by any process of lighting to disperse the gloom that would somehow gather in its corners. Indeed, not the painting-room simply, but every other room in the house, seemed to present itself as a likely and promising haunt for a ghost. Almost everywhere a mysterious murkiness pervaded; projecting masses of wall flung dark shadows, sunken windows starved the light, while dust-crusted panes sullied it. And then the stairs creaked, the boards started, the wainscot cracked in a way that was certainly rather alarming: especially when you had once got thoroughly into your mind the notion that the house was haunted. Hitherto, I confess, such an idea had not occurred to me, and I had constantly visited Venn, passing up and down his great staircase, and in and out of his great grim rooms without ever suspecting that ghosts were possibly dogging my steps, or lurking in corners watching my movements, or creeping into nooks and corners to get out of my way. Now, however, I saw the thing from a very different point of view. It was palpable the place was haunted. As I glanced over my shoulder, and round the room—not without, I admit, a vague dread of detecting some horrid object, unperceived before, crouching among the distant shadows—I felt more and more convinced of the fact. We had often laughed at Venn about his cheap house, had made facetious reference to its being in chancery, the property of a lunatic landlord, and so on, but I don't think we had ever hit upon the real truth, now so self-evident, it was beyond all question—Venn had got his house cheaply because it was haunted, and no one else could be found to live in it.

And yet, after all, there was little enough in the studio;

it was simply a large room, barely habitable from the comfortless way in which it was fitted up. Venn carried his views as to the picturesqueness of dirt and litter to quite an excess: he never permitted the dust to be disturbed, or a cobweb to be removed. Some of us were, on the other hand, very dainty about our studios, decking them with carved oak and choice specimens of china and Venetian glass, hangings of mediæval tapestry, cut velvet, or stamped leather, making them as spruce and pretty as a lady's boudoir. Venn denounced all such doings as fopperies and finicking rubbish. "I hate to be surrounded by things I can smash or spoil. I only want room to turn round and splash my oils or spurt my turps about in. This is a studio, not a hair-cutting saloon. Some of you fellows can't paint unless you have diamond rings on your fingers, and bear's-grease on your hair, and scent on your pocket-handkerchiefs. You'll mix your colours with eau-de-Cologne next. This studio not comfortable! What more do you want? Aren't there chairs to sit down upon, and a square of carpet in front of the fire? It is a little ragged, I own; but that's from the hot coals jumping out of the fire now and then, and fellows dropping their fusees about. I'm not going to load the place with gimcracks and furniture, as you do. What good do you get out of them? They only cost money, and absorb the light. There's not too much of either of those articles in this studio, I can tell you." So he held to his desolate, destitute painting-room, with its few ricketty Windsor chairs, its cloudy ceiling and uneven floor, its bare, dingy wainscoting, only ornamented here and there by a "life study," or a vague outline in chalk or charcoal; stray canvasses resting here and there with their faces turned to the wall, the failures to be found in all studios: inchoate undertakings which the artist can never persuade himself to complete or destroy thoroughly, but suffers rather to wear out and perish of their own accord, aided by time and dust and damp.

"Well, tell us about this ghost, Venn," said Tom Thoroton. We had waited for some few minutes, in hopes that Venn

would volunteer a narration on the subject. But he did not seem inclined to speak; sat quietly smoking his pipe, apparently absorbed in the contemplation of its well-coloured bowl. It was evident that he required to be stimulated into talking by coaxing and questioning.

"Tell us about this ghost, Venn."

"What do you want to know about it?" he asked.

"When did you first see it?"

"Not long after I took this house."

"Weren't you frightened?"

"Well, not exactly frightened. I was vexed and annoyed at first, but I got used to it afterwards; there was nothing so very alarming about it."

"Did it stay long?"

"Some few days."

"What! then you saw it by daylight? I thought ghosts never appeared except at night?"

"Ah, it's clear you get your notion of ghosts from the theatre; you're thinking of 'his majesty of buried Denmark,' and Banquo, and the tent scene in Richard the Third. But the ghosts have changed all that; they take their walks by day now as well as by night."

"You're joking, Venn."

"Very well, then, let's change the subject; I didn't start it; and I'm sure I don't want to go on with it."

But of course we were not going to let the thing drop in that unsatisfactory way. Venn's coyness only piqued our curiosity the more.

"No, no," I said, "let's hear all about it, old fellow. Does it come often?"

"Well, no. I couldn't stand it constantly; it would be rather too much of a good thing, you know. A little of it I don't so much mind; but of course it would be terribly in the way of my work if it were here always. I should have to give up the place, in fact."

"But how often does it come?"

"Well; two or three times a year, say—not more."

"And stop a few days each time?"

"Exactly."

"Hanged if I should like it, though," said Tom Thoroton; and he passed his hand across his forehead. "It's all very well for you, Venn, to talk in that cool way about it; but I know I should be terribly upset if a ghost were to come and take up his abode in my place for days together. I shouldn't be able to do a stroke of work while it stayed, or to get a wink of sleep, or to eat or drink ever so little." And Tom Thoroton emptied his tumbler. He looked very white, I thought. He was at all times a young fellow of rather an active imagination.

"One gets used to things," said Venn, with a philosophical air; "and I always find that if one's appetite goes away, it comes back again, sure enough. I wish one's money would do the same."

"Does it come upon you suddenly, or do you know when to expect it?"

"Well, some time before, I have a notion that it will make its appearance."

"Ah! I see; a presentiment?"

"A presentiment, if you like."

"A presage of coming misfortune?"

"That, too, if you will have it so. I don't go in for fine language much myself."

"You find yourself disturbed in mind; oppressed in an unaccountable way?"

"I find that, after certain bad attacks of extravagance and idleness, comes a depression of spirits, and then the ghost."

"But you're never low-spirited, Venn?"

"I am, sometimes. But when such misfortune happens to me I know what course to pursue. I keep myself to myself, as people say. I don't victimize my friends. I don't try to pull them down to my low level. I don't want to inoculate every one I meet with my malady. Low spirits are very catching sort of things. A determined man may

spread his disorder far and wide among his acquaintances, if he gives his mind to it. For my part I feel penitent, and a little ashamed; and I lock myself up till I am better. I don't care to go whining about, making everybody miserable under the pretence of obtaining their sympathy."

I don't know whether Venn meant it so or not; but this was certainly rather hard upon some of us, who, I own, were a little apt to impart not only our joys but also our griefs, in fact, especially our griefs, to our friends, without much regard to their feelings so long as we obtained some small sense of relief by the proceeding.

"But you're not speaking of a real ghost, Venn, but a sort of apparition of the mind, born of gloom, and idleness, and some irregularity of life, and consequent contrition. Your ghost is only the result of a disordered fancy, weakened nerves, disturbed health."

"Nothing of the kind," said Venn, quietly. "I'm speaking of a real ghost, tangible, unmistakable, who comes into this studio, and sits in that chair for long, long hours together."

He pointed to the "sitter's" chair, raised on a dais, the usual studio property. Of course we all turned to look at the chair, following his hand as he pointed to it, almost expecting to see the ghost then and there occupying that seat of vantage. No ghost was there, however.

"By George! it must be very awful," said Tom Thoroton, in a moved voice. "Fancy a ghost coming into a fellow's studio, and sitting down there for hours together! By George! enough to drive a fellow mad."

"As I said before, Tom, it's annoying until one get's accustomed to it."

"Is the ghost—a woman?" asked Frank Ripley.

"No, Frank—you needn't grin—not a woman; not at all like a woman."

Frank Ripley's organ of veneration was by no means well developed. It was no laughing matter that we were discussing. Perhaps in truth he was only laughing—as the scoffer will sometimes laugh—to conceal his fears.

"Not a woman, Frank, nor anything so very awful, Tom. I'm not setting up to be tremendous in the way of nerve and pluck. But the ghost doesn't come to me in an alarming form; it is, on the contrary, a simple, unpretending ghost enough, is quiet and pacific in its nature and demeanour, seems indeed anxious to give me as little trouble as possible under the circumstances."

"What form does it take then?"

"That of a little wizen old man in a shabby long brown great-coat, with a red comforter round his neck."

"Why then——," I began.

"What have you got to say on the subject?" Venn inquired rather sharply, I fancied.

"Why, don't you remember? I called on you one day—there was some difficulty about my seeing you, but I was let in at last—and there was some one sitting here, answering that description: a little old man in a long brown coat, with a comforter round his neck; he was sitting quietly in that chair: he didn't speak a word—in fact, I don't remember that he moved."

"When was it?"

"Not long after Christmas."

"Ah! yes, I remember now. Well, that was the ghost that haunts this house."

"By Jove! then I've seen him."

I took a new interest in myself. I was master of an extraordinary experience. I also had seen a ghost. That seeing it, I didn't at the time know it to be a ghost, was a little disappointing, I admit; yet in truth it did not materially affect the question.

"Then I've seen him!" I became an object of attention to the whole room.

"Let us have no more scepticism about this matter," said Venn, almost hilarious in his "triumph." "No more talk about nerves, and fancy, and bad health—that sort of thing. The story doesn't rest upon my credit solely; unlooked-for evidence has turned up quite at the right moment. The ghost has been seen by other eyes than mine."

"But I say, weren't you frightened, old fellow?" Tom Thoroton inquired of me.

"Well, not so much as you might fancy, Tom; because, don't you see, I never thought about the man being a ghost. In fact, he didn't look the least like a ghost—that is to say, according to one's preconceived ideas as to what a ghost should look like. No more like a ghost than I look, or you, for that matter—not so much as you, perhaps, Tom, for you're looking uncommonly white to-night, old man."

"What! the ghost was sitting there, and you didn't know that it was a ghost?"

"No; I thought the old man was a model. In fact, I think Venn said he was a model. Certainly he made a sketch of him."

"You made a sketch of the ghost, Venn?" they all exclaimed in amazement.

"Yes, a very slight thing," he said.

"By George! you *have* a nerve!" cried Tom Thoroton admiringly.

"Here's the sketch," said Venn, as he took a millboard from a corner of the room. "It's flimsy enough, and a little too low in tone; but it was done on a very dark day. It will give you some idea of the man. I described him as a model, because—well—because," he explained, half-laughing, "I thought it would be pleasanter for all parties that his real character should not be revealed; it saved a great deal of awkwardness and troublesome explanation; nothing could be more embarrassing, I should think, than a formal introduction to a ghost, *as* a ghost; it was better to regard him for the nonce in the light of an ordinary human being. I'm sure he was grateful to me for so considering him. You're not afraid to look at the drawing, Tom? That can't hurt you, at all events."

We all looked at the drawing. Certainly there was nothing very remarkable about it. It was very slight, in oils; thinly painted, and sketchily treated: not well defined—hardly made out at all in places. Yet undoubtedly it bore a

decided resemblance to the old man I had seen in the studio.

"Still, I wonder at your nerve," persisted Tom Thoroton.

"Well, you see, Tom, I'm a practical sort of fellow. Given a ghost in your studio, the question arises how to utilise him?. Well, why not make a study of him? It always is good practice to make sketches and studies of any and everything. The thing's very simple."

"Did the ghost make any objection?"

"Not the least in the world. He was rather pleased at the idea—was flattered—glad to be of use. Ghosts, it seems to me, have a good many of the weaknesses of the flesh, and they are not nearly so black, or for that matter so white, as they are often painted. For instance, the ghost in question was very happy to make himself at home. I begged him to do so, and he complied. He was even so accommodating as to smoke a pipe with me."

"He smoked a pipe!" we all exclaimed.

"Fancy smoking a pipe with a ghost!" cried Tom Thoroton in a scared voice.

"Yes; here's the identical pipe! I put it on one side for him in case he should want it again." And Venn took from the high mantelpiece a long clay "churchwarden." We all examined it with deep interest, though of course it was a fac-simile of thousands of other "churchwardens." But then a pipe which had been smoked by a ghost was naturally a curiosity, of its kind almost unique.

"He smoked! Did he talk?"

"Yes. But he was not a ghost of any great conversational powers. He did his best, however, to make himself agreeable. I think he appreciated my method of treating him, which was decidedly polite. I flatter myself I'm polite to every one. Why should I alter my usual line of conduct in the presence of a ghost? I was polite to him and considerate. I endeavoured to make his abode here, while it lasted, as agreeable as I could to both of us. I fancy in other haunts he meets with a less pleasant reception. When

you come to think of it, you know, people generally are really very rude to ghosts. Instead of treating them with any sort of respect, they stare at them, scream at them, call them names, such as "horrible shadow," "unreal mockery," "goblin damned;" apply to them other equally offensive epithets, and sometimes go into convulsive fits, or faint right off at the sight of them. Well, you know that's really not pleasant to the ghost, and a ghost has his feelings like anybody else—places him, indeed, in a very awkward and painful position. He doesn't want to disturb the peace of families, or to do any harm really. He only asks to be let alone. Perfect quiet is much more congenial to him than indecent uproar and alarm. If his appearance is not attractive, that's hardly to be considered as his fault. If his presence is objectionable, he can't very well help that. I'll undertake to say he doesn't really want to be wandering about to and fro upon the earth, making himself unpleasant. He'd much prefer sitting quietly at home—wherever that may be—if he could have altogether his own way in the matter."

"This is all very well, you know, Venn; but if the ghost were to come in now, you wouldn't like it."

"I quite admit it, Frank. I should dislike it very much. Still, I trust I should know how to behave with a proper regard for the decencies of life. A ghost understands seemly behaviour; while for good manners I'm convinced that ghosts have quite as good manners as—well, let us say picture-dealers."

"But are you sure this is a ghost, Venn? Are there no other lodgers in the house?"

"None, only the old woman—my housekeeper—who let you fellows in and who'll let you out, presently; there's no hurry."

"But how do you account for this ghost?"

"Ah, that's a very grave question (I don't mean a pun). I may have a notion myself on the subject."

"Well, what is it?"

"No. I won't state it just at present. I should like to hear first what is the usual theory about ghosts. Can any

one tell me?—in a few words, of course. No one wants to have a long lecture on the subject."

"Well, a man dies with something on his mind, consequently his spirit can get no rest, but continues to haunt the earth," explained Tom Thoroton.

"And that something on his mind?"

"Well, let us say that in his lifetime he has hidden a treasure, which remains undiscovered; he has died suddenly without time to make a revelation on the subject. Perhaps for want of the money his family are in great distress, so he can't rest quiet, but haunts the place where his treasure lies secreted. Plenty of ghost stories run like that. There may be some treasure hidden beneath the floor of this room."

"If I thought it I'd soon have the boards up and secure it. But I don't believe a word of it. The only treasure in this room amounts to about fifteen and fourpence, which I have here"—Venn slapped his pocket as he spoke. "Only fifteen and fourpence—and I owe—well, never mind how much I owe. Of course I don't include in my calculation such small coin as you fellows may have in your pockets. Your money can't be said in any way to pertain to the room. No, Tom; I can't admit your explanation about the buried treasure. It's too improbable. A buried treasure in a studio! Impossible!"

"But it needn't be a buried treasure," cried Thoroton; "ghosts haunt places for other reasons than that. Instance, a sin committed, unatoned for, unavenged."

"Ah!" Venn seemed to think this explanation more reasonable. "But what sort of a sin? Something rather strong in that way, of course?"

"Well, say a bigamy?" Thoroton exclaimed rather at random. I fancy he had been reading a good many sensational novels of late.

"Or a forgery!" suggested some one.

"Or embezzlement!"

"Or arson!"

"Or murder!" Then there was silence for a few minutes.

"What do you say, Venn?" Thoroton asked breathlessly.

"No. Not murder, I should think, Tom. Not murder exactly, but rather an execution!"

"An execution!" we all shouted.

"Ah! Like that in 'Les Trois Mousquetaires,' perhaps!" cried Tom Thoroton, breathlessly.

Before Venn could answer, there came a loud single knock at the door. We were instantly silent. "Come in," said Venn.

There was a shuffling sound, the door opened slowly—very slowly—and then a figure appeared, advanced into the room, and stood amongst us.

It was the ghost!

I think we were all frightened. I know *I* was; and we had real cause for alarm. There was no mistake about it. The new comer was the little old man I had once before seen in Venn's studio, not knowing him to be a ghost: it was the little wizen old man in the long brown coat and the red comforter, a sketch of whose portrait Venn had just showed us. We looked at the ghost, then at each other, then at the ghost again, then at Venn. What white faces we all had! from the glare of the gas, of course.

Even Venn was disturbed, I could see, though he made an effort to conceal or to overcome his emotion. He made a step forward to where the figure of the little old man was standing.

"You'll think me very late, I'm afraid," said the ghost, in an odd, quavering voice. He made a bow as he spoke—a bow that was almost grotesque in its exceeding obsequiousness, I remember thinking at the time.

"Well, it *is* late," said Venn, with a forced air of not caring about the thing.

"Better late than never, you know, Mr. Venn," observed the ghost.

"I don't quite see that," said Venn, with tolerable coolness. He must have had a very critical turn of mind. Fancy taking an objection to the ghost's simple citation of a popular proverb! How Thoroton marvelled at him!

"I'm afraid I'm disturbing you, and these good gents,"

and the ghost glanced round at us with a queer smile. What a sparkle—quite a supernatural sparkle—there was in his little round black eyes! And then—I'm sure it grated upon all of us to be called *gents* by a ghost!

"Stow me anywheres if I'm at all in the way. There ain't no need, you know, Mr. Venn, to be pertikler to a shade," said the ghost.

("By George, though," murmured Tom Thoroton, "I thought ghosts talked better English than that!")

"Only you know, Mr. Venn, the other parts of the 'ouse ain't over and above 'abitable. Still, I'm accommodatin', I am; and if its ill-convenient for me to come in here at the present moment, why I don't mind sittin' down on the stairs outside for a hour or two—only mind, fair's fair; no larks, *fain smuggings*; no disturbing the property, such as there is," and he looked round the room, not reverently, I thought, in regard to its few contents. "You've always behaved the thorough gen'elman to me, Mr. Venn, *that* I will say: tipping me liberal and treating me 'andsome, it would be 'ard if I couldn't be accommodatin' for a hour or two; wouldn't it now, gents?" and he looked round at us again.

"We'll go, Venn." There was a general movement towards our hats and coats. We seemed all stirred by a common desire to get away from Venn's studio as quickly as we might.

"Stop," cried Venn, in some excitement, the tones of his voice very hollow and solemn, and yet with a sort of desire to laugh twitching about his lips as he spoke.

"You mustn't go like this. The unforeseen circumstance that has occurred forces upon me an explanation, though I had not contemplated giving any. Some one just now suggested that there had been a *murder* committed in this house. I proposed by way of amendment to substitute the word *execution*. That is the truth, the real truth, gentlemen. There *has* been an execution in this house. In point of fact there have been many executions in this house; and there *is* an execution in this house at the present moment.

Moreover, my old acquaintance here, the ghost, is no other than—*a man in possession.*"

"A man in possession!" we echoed.

"Yes; and he haunts me, and this house, soon after quarter-day, especially. My landlord has a great regard for me as his tenant, but he is ridiculously punctilious on the subject of the receipt of his rent. I have a great respect for him, as a landlord; but I concede that, owing to circumstances over which I have no control, and to which I will not further allude, I am oftentimes not quite so well prepared to pay my rent as doubtless I ought to be. The result generally is—an execution, and the presence of my friend here, in the character of a man in possession. It's one of the inconveniences of having a house all to oneself—an inconvenience that is amply compensated for by the many advantages of the arrangement. I have already referred to them. I said just now that, after bad attacks of extravagance and idleness, came depression of spirits; and then—the ghost. In plainer words, I don't work, and I get into debt. I don't pay my rent, and the landlord puts in an execution, and I am haunted by my friend here—a very worthy old person in his way—who's presently going to smoke a pipe, and have a glass of grog with me, as he's done before now. But he'll go out on Monday, when I shall receive money enough to satisfy all outstanding claims, my landlord's among the rest. Why hurry away? This is a 'most honest ghost; that let me tell you.' Come, another tumbler all round. Why not? That's right. Don't talk about spirits any more; but put them in your glasses and drink them—properly diluted, of course, and with a little sugar and lemon."

It was evident that, in considering George Venn, we had entirely failed to appreciate one element in his character. He possessed an inclination for humour and practical jesting beyond anything we had ever given him credit for. But then—the fact has been already stated—we were all very young men; and perhaps our conduct occasionally rendered us particularly open to jocose comment and criticism.

THE MYSTERY IN DAFFODIL TERRACE.

I.

THE house was pointed out by a young Arab of the crossing, who had been skipping on before the decent inquirer in black, as the manner of his tribe is. And he pattering away to his Augean beat, the decent stranger looks up through his glasses at the house with much relish—as though it were a ripe and luscious fruit. He seemed to have ample value for his money, and literally gorged his eyes with the prospect.

Had he been a miser he might have groaned over his misspent pennies: for the spot was advertised ever so conspicuously by a group of the great unclean—men and women of the broad rag world hanging about, in the middle of the road—leaning on the rails, and on the gate, kept fast locked, to have their full of staring. Scraps of this shabby community dribbled away at one end, while other scraps came and restored the fit balance at the other. And though no one of them could say that they expected the front to tumble flat like a "practical" scene out of a pantomime, or that the doors were to be flung open and they were to be invited in to hospitality, and be otherwise handsomely treated, still they all had some good purpose in staring at the house, and found the process satisfactory. They had been staring since eight o'clock on that morning, and would stare on until dark. And, it may be repeated, they had good method in their staring.

II.

THE next question is—for those not of the locality—what these units of the great corps of the unwashed were

staring at. At a house; but this is too general. At number five, then, Daffodil Terrace—number five being but an inch out of so many hundred yards of neat, bright-red brick ribbon, reeled off in a terrace *ad infinitum*—a row of pantomime houses projected *in æternum*—beautifully chastened, and in a manner Ruskinized by little edging and confectionery work of parti-coloured bricks, mainly mustard colour, and producing a very "tasty" effect. Contractor had done his work nobly and was actually reeling off miles of a similar pattern, just like an expert shopman at his counter—on the new building grounds out towards the country. But why should the unwashed, and the butcher-boy element, and the strap-and-pot element so fancy this special number five, particularly when they had a whole file, stretching to number two hundred and eighty or so to pick from? Why the fact is, it was whispered that a very ugly business had taken place there that morning—very painful for the immediate family, and most undesirable for the neighbourhood, in reference to a letting or other view. The life of a line of respectable tenements should move in smooth, equable course, and should not be disturbed by vulgar spasmodics. As it is with your true persons of quality, who have nothing marked in dress or manner, so with your true houses of quality. And yet here was nothing short of suicide, gross, flagrant, outspeaking suicide entailing a distressing publicity—and the whole notorious train of coroner, police, doctors, post-mortems, and the other disagreeable incidents. The curious part of the business was, that this was about the last sort of catastrophe mankind, in that neighbourhood, might reasonably have looked for. For only a few days back they had been very busy with an expected nuptial rite, whereof the scene was to be in that very house. The actors, properties, incidents, and decorations of that ceremonial had all been in possession of the public for some time. The neighbourhood had been rife with the particulars. It was a common fund, in which all had a common interest. They knew the

name of the man, the woman, his substance, her substance, what difficulties lay between—in short, the whole prelude of the thing. It was to be a very gay thing, and a very happy thing; much desired too by all parties. The name of the woman or girl (so people from within the rails told it to those without) was Margaret—Margaret Joy—an only daughter. The house was the house of the Joy family, father and mother; the name of the man, who was to take this woman for his wedded wife, was Mr. Hengist, a City person who had travelled, and the name of what lay up stairs, covered up with a sheet, was Martha Joy, wife of the house.

Now for this marriage, and this suicide, and the tangled yarn that led to both. Suicide lies up there in ghastly reality: marriage is scattered to the winds now beyond hope of re-establishment.

III.

To begin by looking back a few years or so, when the Joy family first came to the decent neighbourhood, and the placid respectability of speckless brickwork. The head of the Joy family, then about forty-five; the gentlewoman who was titularly mistress, but in plain fact, a sort of lady-like upper-servant, ordering meals and looking after all things —about eight-and-thirty. She and the bright brick house had about come together; for Joy, elderly as he was, had married and moved into the neighbourhood almost simultaneously. House and wife came together; house quite new and brilliant; wife second hand and a little worn—nay, bringing with her drags *impedimenta* in the shape of human baggage—a growing youth—her only jointure as a widow. Joy, this ripe bridegroom of forty-six, was a quiet, placid merchant-man, with a cold, dry, calm face, not overcharged with blood;—one who crept along the walls and dark lanes of life, keeping out of the light, and avoiding brushing skirts with all he met—a tall man, a bent man, a slight man, a silent man, a man that had made money silently;

without emotion or agitation had married, and moved into the staring brick neighbourhood almost simultaneously—a man that had been perhaps proved by fire in the earlier portion of his days; that had been wrung and wasted by the hot winds of tremendous domestic tribulation. It was said, indeed, that his whole family, mother, sisters, and one brother, had been swept away suddenly—in about a week's time—by a destroying plague, then epidemic. Such a bit of tragedy was in good keeping with that sad and impassive face, and might be read there in plain bold figures. Some sort of tragedy had been scorched and seared into his face, and he wore the scars very palpably.

He then, wandering along this sad sea-shore, fell in with this Calypso of a widow, and finding she had some sort of balm, which, without curing, did somewhat allay the pain of his open wounds, took her in—love they were both past—she, perhaps, more moved by a sort of compassion or sympathy for the poor silent wayfarer. However, on whatever pretext, they were joined, and came to the house together, taking with them, too, her daughter, soft Margaret—a sweet, milky-looking child, whose destiny it was to be passive in every possible relation of life. The son was an evil scapegrace, who had rushed away into open wickedness, and it had been well had he been never more heard of. But, unhappily, he showed himself, comet-like, at irregular intervals, and always under circumstances of dubious colour, in a sort of disreputable halo; so that this fitful manifestation, though satisfactory as allaying any personal fears that might be entertained as to his safety, was attended with such pain and discomfort to his surviving relations, that on the whole it had been better he had sunk at once for ever into the limbo or worse place prepared for such disreputable meteors.

On the new Mrs. Joy these wearing sorrows told with nearly the same characteristic handwriting as on her husband's features. They had each their own private store of affliction; and what little balance of cheerfulness was

over and above they spent with all good heart upon each other. And so they made their lives somewhat sweeter—after a fashion.

IV.

He was in a sort of traffic or business, as has been already mentioned, and had brought together a decent sufficiency, to which he was daily adding. Thus the true bitter of sorrow, poverty, had not oozed into their cup. Grief is more tolerable when it can sob on soft cushions, and recline undisturbed, without work or labour, in handsome apartments. For such sorrows there are luxuries. And so they moved forward upon the even tenour of their way, inhabiting the bright vermilion house, and, in some sort, one of the pillars of that select villa neighbourhood. Naturally all persons round took pride in denizens of such position; and thus they moved forward steadily and peacefully—impelled by the sure hand of destiny—on to the fatal beginning of that end which has been shadowed at the opening of this story. For though we know that grim and pitiless Greek notion of fate has been swept away, still to us, who look down at the march of a story and its characters, it has very much the look of that old cruel force; and we see the men and women of the piece walking on unconsciously to their doom; and as they walked, the Chorus in those old Greek plays chanted Ai! Ai! compassionately bewailing their fate in, as it were, a monk's hymn.

V.

There had come to live, some few doors below them, a wealthy man called Hengist, but of a somewhat curious nature. A man touching five-and-thirty, solitary, and hurrying with extraordinary swiftness down the headlong montagne Russe of old bachelorhood. He would have been at the bottom and lost irretrievably had not some one laid hold of him and checked him.

But of a very curious nature—suspicious, and slightly eccentric, which comes of living alone—an avaricious creature, which was strange in one so young; who had been abroad in India, and come home invalided, and tolerably wealthy; had been left more moneys; and now, too delicate to add more moneys still to that, had retired to watch life and look on jealously. Everybody, of course, had designs against his personal liberty; all—more particularly the women—were banded together to suspend the Habeas Corpus specially in his behalf. Along those trimly carved walks female bandits were abroad. They lay in ambuscade.

And yet he was amiable in his character; full of charities, and the tests of charities, local subscriptions. For him kept house a matron of tolerably and satisfactory antiquity. He read of the long evenings by his shaded lamp; walked abroad during the day; went into London now and again, but with terrible reluctance; and fancied he was killing weary days with good effect. So *he*, too, moved forwards, slowly yet surely, to whatever crisis our modern Fate kept in store for him.

This was not so very long arriving. We may guess easily enough. These lonely wrecks are easy spoil. Betimes every morning, the soft, milk-faced girl used to go forth to take her country walk, as she fancied it, and inhale the morning air well charged with copious villa particles. Regularly would she flit by the window—somewhere near the same hour—where this Hengist would be seen framed in his huge sheet of plate glass, in a miscellany of urn and teapot and rolls, and the newspaper in full sail, making his lonely breakfast. Regular, too, used this Hengist lift his head, and look out on her as she passed. The true charitably-minded will see a purpose in this steady morning, artful baiting of traps, and such unhandsome hints. But she was wholly innocent of any such purpose. In the long file of shining brick mansions there was much more company, just as busy, and with about the same unflagging

regularity. That breakfasting behind plate glass was an ordinary ceremony enough along the line of villas.

The course of these things we may all guess out pretty easily. In what comes by custom we take interest. This strange suspicious Hengist began to look for her regularly, as he did for his rolls and newspaper; and if rain or other reason hindered her coming, became uncomfortable, as though he had been defrauded of a portion of his breakfast. With him all women were more or less marauders—in respect to monied men at least; but here he was impregnable, and perfectly secure, for he could look on unperceived and unsuspected. By-and-by came opportunity, as opportunity will come always. The "administration" charged with the arrangement of such little matters contrived it by the agency of a lost dog, or bird, or kitten. Bird it was. The young lady's parrot had one evening fluttered away, having a chain to its foot, taking the intervening walls like fences, and hotly pursued. Mr. Hengist was in his garden at the time, and captured it promptly. Presently the sad-faced parent comes and knocks, and to him the prisoner was handed over—not, however, before he is bidden to sit down and rest, though he be not tired, and they condole with each other on some district grievances—ill scavengering, inefficient watering of streets, and the like. Then he goes his way. Such a foundation the other is not slow to improve. Sometimes they meet going in to London, by rail or stage, sometimes along the public highway; the sad-faced gentleman accepting tolerantly rather than seeking him. By-and-by he gets on a stage further—still in his old cautious way; receding now with mistrust—now advancing—until at last he has entered, has been made known to the sober sorrowful mistress of the mansion, and to the damsel that was wont to trip past his window as he breakfasted.

He was not unamiable, this Hengist, and soon domesticated himself readily enough. Not one of them sought him. The parents were glad because they thought such an

acquaintance would vary the somewhat monotonous existence of their daughter's life. For, odd as he was, his oddity came not of vacuity. He had seen much and travelled a good deal, and was ready enough with a dry speech and caustic remark, not altogether unamusing. So he was very soon dovetailed into their course of life: came in of evenings when it suited him, played cards, read books to them, or to himself when it pleased him, and on the whole found it a rather agreeable sort of club.

There was a cousin, too, who came out occasionally from London; a gay, open-faced, open-mouthed carle, rather boisterous, and wearing his heart, not exactly upon his sleeve, but displayed conspicuously upon every part of his person. The cousin, Wilsden by name, came out in rather conspicuous contrast beside the somewhat crusted nature of the other. He, in truth, rather looked down on him, as deficient; was merry at his expense, and gave him a private nickname. But he could rarely come of evenings; so that Hengist had a tremendous advantage over him. Night, after all, is the true season for social business.

Sometimes it flashed upon him that he was standing on the edge of a precipice—that here was a band of insidious plotters, artfully leagued against his person and liberty. At this notion he would take fright and stay away a week, sometimes two; until, as they made no sign, and did not come with violence to storm him in his castle, he was much relieved, and came back of his own motion, with a sort of penitential air. Then he would find the loud cousin in firm possession, and feel a sort of curious resentment within himself for having given him such an advantage. Perhaps it was a diluted jealousy.

So he came and went, and stayed away, and came again; and all the while was growing rather fond of this white-faced girl. The sad-eyed parents looked on from afar, and let him have his way. They did not see into these things; they did not heed them. The pale-faced child did not consider him much in any light whatsoever—just tolerated him;

but it is to be suspected, was seriously inclined to the boisterous cousin. So the thing went on, but growing, in some shape, all the while.

The wild comet still reached its perihelion occasionally, and flashed upon the horizon as usual; but latterly with a steadily increasing recurrence. Every six months there was some fresh disgrace—every month—and presently every fortnight, or so. And for all these rescues had to be found. By-and-by came bill transactions, ugly in character, and all but reaching to an *exposé*, but happily warded off at a large sacrifice. There was no end to these trials. The worn face of the parent became yet more worn.

VI.

With her husband, also, things had not gone so prosperously of late. Real languid *insouciance* of affliction and *cœur brisé* does not do for the world of business. A heavy loss came, and he looked on insensibly. He set himself, without much exertion, to repair this casualty, and did not succeed. Thus was much capital being nibbled. After all, what was dross to the poor *cœur brisé!* He only followed the thing for distraction's sake. And so the money began to drip—drip away through his fingers—like so much water. One evening he told his wife quite plainly that they should have to live very savingly now, and stint themselves a good deal; for that he had met with very heavy losses, and nearly all his money was gone—a statement which she accepted, with more trepidation and alarm than one would have expected from her dulled nature. But the fact was, at that moment it came most unfortunately, and she was thinking, not of herself, nor of that pale-faced girl, but of the wild, erratic comet, then gyrating with its most tremendous velocity, and committing the worst extravagances in its course. All along she had furnished secret supplies; fed its fires from her own private stores; pinched her own moderate expenses to have yet a greater surplus. And yet

the drain seemed endless. It lay upon her as a tremendous weight, that this lost youth would one day break out into some great and indelible disgrace, such as would fix upon him the attention of the kingdom. And to avert some most horrible catastrophe, by evoking pecuniary emollients, was her pious aim. That destiny would bring such a thing about before the end came, she firmly believed; but her wish was to avert as long as possible what was to come inevitably. It was before her of nights; and disturbed even such unquiet dreams as she had. It made her restless during the day; and, above all, she had to carry this about within her, unsupported—for her husband had troubles sufficient of his own: and, indeed, had the errors of this scapegrace never very glaringly laid open before him.

Thus it will be seen what curious elements were all working together simultaneously within the spick and span red-brick house, each in a channel of its own, and mostly unsuspected by the others. The father had his private tribulation—the mother hers; the visitor, his little bit of disquietude; and the pale-faced daughter, such sorrow as she found in her parents' sorrow.

It was found, after some fruitless efforts to retrieve his ill-luck, that they had barely sufficient for a contracted existence, and that they must, before the end of the year, actually quit the staring brick house, and seek some more suitable residence.

On this there came a visible change in the pale-faced girl. She was gracious to the visitor; soothed his dudgeon; all but broke with the cousin. It looks doubtful, yet it came from the best of motives. She would save those she loved from shipwreck, at whatever risk or sacrifice. Cousins' loves must all go overboard when wreck is at hand.

VII.

At last it came to one gloomy evening in the month of misfortunes, November—or at least that month which

supplies fitting scenery and furniture for troubles of all kinds—when the two are sitting in the shadow, each with their own private weight of care upon their hearts. Things were coming to a yet poorer pass. The world was using them yet more and more cruelly still. Something like a catastrophe was impending over their heads, and could not be delayed more than a month or so. His was not the mind for a crisis, and therefore ill-suited to finding out a remedy. His was not a bold, fighting nature, that would struggle before it would die, but would surrender tamely, and without a blow.

To the door then comes the scarlet postman of the district, and a letter is brought. In troubled times all letters bring evil news, or, at least, are expected to do so. This one was opened by Mrs. Joy, and read privately in her own chamber:

"MADAM,—I am sorry to be obliged to communicate to you so unpleasant a piece of intelligence as this letter contains, but it is better for you that you should learn the worst at once. A bill was presented to me for payment a few days since, bearing what appeared to be my own signature. I saw at once it was a forgery, and had no doubt whose was the hand that did it. As you are aware I had been obliged to discharge your son from my employment about a month ago; but he was very soon discovered, and admitted the charge.

"I have long hesitated between my duty to public justice and to friendship, as to what course I shall take in this matter. However, feeling for your situation acutely, and knowing that you have other troubles sufficient, I would be willing on receipt of the sum (150*l.*) to forego any further proceedings in the business. I hope it will be a lesson to the young man.

"The money I must have in a few days, as the bill must be taken up.

"I am, dear madam, yours, &c.,

"JASPAR BROWN."

This was a terrible stroke—both the moral blow, as well as the physical inconvenience. Moneys were not to be found now; and this was truly the last straw breaking the camel's back. And yet it did not come with such a shock; for previous misfortunes had toned them to a suitable frame of mind. And so they sat on, in the gloom of that miserable evening, without proposing remedy or relief, until their daughter, now out for some time, came in.

VIII.

She was nervous and shy, and somewhat flurried. She had a wonderful piece of news to break to them which she did almost joyfully. She had been out walking; had met Mr. Hengist, who had turned round and walked with her; had spoken with her seriously, and in that odd, jerky way of his had actually proposed to her. He was very good, very generous, and all the rest of it; and she was sure in time she would come to like him. So for that night, at least, the angel of trouble folded up his wings. The clouds were dispersed, the mists and unwholesome damps of pecuniary embarrassment were shattered. There was jubilee in the bright brick house. Still, for the present, money was lacking; and though things pointed to the new bridegroom as deliverer, there came difficulties in the way, which effectually cut off that hope of rescue. For this curious nature of Hengist was so strange and flighty, there was no knowing at what turn it would be scared and take flight. And in an early interview with the father, it was very soon apparent that this was dangerous ground. For when it was told to him, that no fortune could be offered to him with the girl, he fell into great disorder, and spoke of mistakes and misapprehensions, and finally said he had been deceived, and went his way, leaving them with the impression that all was over. There are rich men who think it due to their dignity that riches should be brought to them. So

for three or four days he was not heard of; but then reappeared as usual, and made no further allusion to the money question. Then came another difficulty. From him had to be concealed the whole of the pecuniary difficulties; for he often made loud proclamation that he had a horror of bankrupt men and women—that such persons seemed to be decayed and mouldy, and to be eaten away with the leprosy of debt. He used to add, too, that he took such pride in his father-in-law being a sound, substantial man; and that hereafter they would one day join their capital and work wonders in the fiscal world. This was a favourite theme of his, and he laid out grand schemes sitting with them over the fire; and pointed with unutterable disgust to such and such a one who had broken down and failed. All the while they listened ruefully, and with a flutter at their hearts. Pity them we must, for they knew not where to turn: and the girl herself was wholly innocent, for they had been careful only to let her know in a misty way of their embarrassments. Then there was another and last difficulty. For a few weeks, indeed, by desperate exertion, they might tide over the danger: but here was this man very slack indeed about his nuptials. He must have time to wind up his affairs. He must go up to the North to sell houses or lands; in short, there must be a couple of months, or six weeks at the least, before he could be ready. And his humour was so fretful; it was dangerous to press him much by way of remonstrance or argument. And, by-and-by, he gave up that shiny brick house of his in the Terrace, meaning to take one in London—and went away, as he said, to wind up his affairs for matrimony.

IX.

The business of the scapegrace son had been tided, though temporarily, by the agency of a short bill at three weeks. Mr. Jaspar Brown, a matter-of fact, business man, had agreed to stay destiny by execution, for that brief span.

But this they knew to be but a poor shift—a more staving off, by the very frailest barrier. And though here a sort of delivery was held out to them with one hand, there was a certain inevitable thunderbolt of destruction menacing them from the other. No possible mode of extrication could they discover. Poor suffering souls! Theirs was not the spirit of youth, fertile in devices, daring and vigorous. Misfortune had made them sluggard. And so they were hurried along, through the gloom and shadows, to the day of reckoning, for sins scarcely their own.

And the day of Joy, too, drew on with equal speed. Hengist, the bridegroom, reappears by-and-by, elated, buoyant, having wound up all things, but more than ever repugnant to broken, bankrupt men. Joyful too was the girl, for she saw deliverance from these gloomy times close at hand—deliverance for herself and parents. Dark care sat beside them alone, and yet they told not of the Nemesis that hung over them. And so the days wore on.

All this time the future bridegroom stopped with them, for his home was gone, and he was shrewd and saving, like all rich men. He had the best bed-room, and was made much of, as was only fitting—at least for the short span the thing would hold out to. Often he said to his future father, regretfully, "Could you not make me out some little money—say five hundred pounds—three—two—one hundred?" And the other had to take refuge in some poor weak pretence about a vow, and about all coming to her eventually, after his death. And the marriage-day was now good three weeks away, and Nemesis but a day or two!

From Jaspar Brown delay had been begged, nay, implored, in piteous letters from Mrs. Joy. Which procedure rather fortified that gentleman in his stern denials; all humblings and self-abasements in money matters being, as is well known, the most fatal instruments. They are confessions of weakness and danger. In a stiff letter Jaspar Brown buttoned up his pockets and refused an hour's delay. He was astounded at such ingratitude; disgusted, perhaps,

at a man reputed wealthy breaking up so disreputably. The law should take its course. Not an hour—not an hour. Nemesis advancing slowly.

X.

Of a Saturday evening Mrs. Joy is sitting dismally over her fire; the others have gone out, and will be in by dinner-time. A weary Saturday; always a day of battle, of siege, of expostulation and entreaty. The gates and approaches were now tolerably clear, and Mrs. Joy sitting over her fire. Suddenly a knock, and she draws a deep sigh, for she knows here is yet another battle to fight, when she thought all was over for the day. She goes out wearily on the old errand, and is face to face with two shabby, scrubby fellows, whose type proclaims itself even to those who have never before been acquainted with it. The flaming red muffler and heavy sticks were sufficient. *We* know these sort of men, and their errand. So did the poor woman then, without the aid of that fluttering piece of paper. They were sheriff's men, and they were now in possession. These were civil and considerate fellows on the whole, and gave no pain in working out their dirty work.

Her wits nearly deserted her at the first, then came back to her with an extraordinary force and vitality. What *was* to be done? What *could* be done? Time but a few minutes; for they might return at any moment. Servant abroad, in garden or yard, so that exposure was happily spared. At this moment not a soul in the house but she herself and those earthly emissaries. And there were twenty pounds or thereabouts—about as much use as twenty pence—a mere scrap. *But there was more money than that in the house!* There was absolutely no help near. The very sight of those sheriff's aides-de-camp—in their drab uniform—waiting in the hall, scared her. The bare notion of that process of the law maketh the heart sink; and praying to these coarse emissaries for a few moments' grace, she fled

away, shrinking, fluttering, and almost gasping with terror, to her own room, there to strive desperately and see if anything in the world *could* suggest itself. At such a crisis, hemmed up into a moral corner, with such cruel wolves at the gate, no wonder if the wildest, even the most unlawful thoughts of extrication, suggested themselves importunately. Some one had received moneys for sale of interest in lease—or lands—and had gone to London too late for banking hours, and had brought his moneys back, and had surely not taken them out with him in his walk. They were lying, in all probability, up stairs in that leathern case of his, in the best bed-room—good yellow gold and notes. We must not judge this poor broken soul too harshly. Think of the two figures before her, now masters of the house; think of the foul associations connected with such ministers; think of those who were walking home with sure steps, and perhaps now not a hundred yards away; think of the fair marriage hanging on a thread; think of black despair at her heart, clouding her eyes, and senses, and moral conscience; think of these things, and let us pity—if we must condemn—that poor frail creature now stealing up stairs.

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XI.

THERE, the air is cleared; the foul sheriff's ministers are gone; but not a minute too soon, for here return the trio from their walk, two very gay and cheerful. That evening passes by; so does the Sunday morning, and public worship, at which all attend. Not until the noon of Sunday does Mr. Hengist come tearing down from his room crying aloud that he has been robbed; that he is undone; that he is ruined; that he will bring everyone to justice.

There is the usual *esclandre* and hubbub. Policemen enter; search, and inspect, and inquire. Three hundred pounds nearly. It is a heavy loss. On whom does suspicion naturally rest in such cases? On the servants.

Call them up: and some wretched trembling Susan, or Mary Jane, is brought in and put to the question. She cries and sobs—circumstances of strong suspicion. Strange to say the box had been neatly opened with a false key; but no key could be found. Still there was nothing beyond suspicion, until in the passage leading to the kitchen, or scullery, or outhouse, was found just such a little Bramah key, which Mrs. Joy identified as hers. This was enough; and Susan or Mary Jane was led away disgracefully in custody.

All this while Mrs. Joy said not a word, looking quite stony and immoveable. Her eyes had a cold, glassy stare. She was as that Nemesis of whom we have been speaking. She was determined to go through with her part, whatever she had undertaken. And she did it bravely; for it is a painful and unpleasant thing to have such a scene in a respectable family. Then when all was over, and the purloining maid taken away, she passed up stairs to her own room.

Hengist was nigh to being distracted, and sat at the fire moaning over his lost treasures. Mr. Joy took his daughter into another room, and told her wearily of what she had not known before. He was tired of the struggle, he said. It must end in a day or two. He could fight it off no longer. It was better that she should know all at once. This unfortunate business of the robbery would finish it. To-morrow, he saw, would bring the end. She was much confounded at such speeches, yet soothed him affectionately, telling him that all would yet be well. He was to cheer up, and all would yet be well. Ah! vain, but fond speech! There is a day when all will yet be well—yet how far away.

She trips off, and passes into the parlour, where there is the other still moaning over his lost ingots. She sets herself to soothe him, humouring him, encouraging him with hope that they will be found. He is at first sour and pettish. But it is hard to resist that sweet face and voice. It was this man's bent of mind to be cheerful, and before very long

she had brought him to be tranquil, to say, what did he care for a few guineas? that he had plenty more as good; with other speeches to the same tune.

Then on this favourable basis she went something further. She brought him to remark what dismal, downcast faces her parents bore, and to ask what sorrows troubled them. Gently she broke it all to him, saying it in a sweet voice, telling him even of that immediate danger which was to come to-morrow. "It is better," she said, "that you should know these things now than later; I myself have only learnt them this evening. I thought we were rich and flourishing; it has turned out otherwise. It is not fair to you that you should enter into our family not knowing of these things; and therefore it is only right that you should be set free."

Hengist was much astonished at this straightforward proposal. That it should have come from him, he could understand; but from her, it was utterly incomprehensible. He was troubled. At first he almost thought there must be something behind, some little plot or deception. Then he became aggrieved. Why did she treat him in this way?—what had he done? It has been mentioned that his was a very curious nature; not very firm or vigorous, and full of contradiction. Presently he had forgotten his money losses, and had fallen into a generous mood, and was ready even to furnish such aid as might ward off present difficulties.

XII.

With a light heart she flew to her father. He took it placidly: he was past any violent emotions of joy or sorrow. "You have saved us," he said; "you are an angel. But run now and tell your poor mother; she is in her room up-stairs, and takes this to heart more than any of us." The angel kissed her father's pale forehead, and bade him be of good heart. "We shall all be very happy together yet," she said; "bright days are in store for us." And she glided away very softly upstairs. That sweet-sounding but

delusive anthem has been sung over and over again. The night of troubles in this instance was passing away, and it did seem fairly open to them to suppose that here a glimmer of dawn was breaking. It *was* likely they were all going to be very happy.

From many weary and wakeful nights it was natural that the poor woman of sorrows upstairs should be seeking a little rest during the daytime. And so her daughter entered cautiously and on tiptoe, fearing to disturb her. It was growing on to be very dark, and through the window came but a half light. No doubt she was sleeping profoundly. And yet, dark as it was, there was light to perceive that on the table lay a letter or packet newly folded and directed. There are occasions when there will be a chain of arguments in the sight of a straw; and a sudden instinct made her turn to the bed where the dark shadowy figure was lying, in her daily dress, so profoundly still and motionless, that——

She darted to the bedside, and then she saw it all.

* * * * *

Now we can guess at the secret of that crowd of unwashed waiting outside the railing of the bright red house on that Monday morning. The coroner came that day; and his jury came; and policemen came. There was not much investigation needed. There was the unfailing little phial, with the strange scent; and the doctor came and told *his* story. It was very clear. The packet, however, was not submitted to those intelligent persons, for it contained a confession so piteous and dismal—the last outpouring of a heart broken, and a spirit crushed. Well might the old formula of insanity—temporary or not—be read in the daily papers; often but a fiction soothing to afflicted relatives, but in this instance to be regarded with all indulgence. Decayed and deserted, the whole story may be now read in that tenement itself! A blight has seized it, and I do not believe that any projected marriage ever took place.

WHY NEW HOUSES ARE HAUNTED.

I MADE an interesting acquaintance the other day. He sat on my right hand at dinner, and, judging by appearance, he might as well have been of note as not. He spoke in German, rapidly, with a precision very much to the point —being one of those large-browed, bright-eyed individuals who can distinguish between masks and faces at a glance, and give a pretty accurate guess as to the kind of soul behind either. His under lip was deeply indented, so that, when smiling, his mouth assumed the same triangular form that characterised Heine, though his humour, while leaning towards sarcasm, was never bitter.

"I saw an old friend to-day," he said, suddenly, turning from his wife to me and throwing one arm comfortably over the back of his chair; "I met him first this summer in the Engadine."

"You were glad to meet him again, then?" said I.

"Most uncommonly glad," he answered, shaking his head emphatically. "Though I never spoke three words to him in my life, yet I can say, with all my heart, that it gives me exceeding joy to see him again. It is impossible to be bored where he is!"

"Are *you* ever bored?" I asked.

"I?" he returned heartily. "Not I, thank God! I am proud to say, I have never been bored a single hour in my life. I see other people wearying themselves; but, while their folly and my own remain to laugh at, *ennui* stays far from me. If it came near, the recollection of my Engadine friend would banish it at once. I will describe him. You will know him, then, for ever, for there cannot be his like on earth. Two such prodigies would be greater bounty on the

part of nature than we poor sinners dare expect. He is about the middle height, has grey hair and a voice like far-off thunder. I should say, rather, a voice lost in a cellar that rolls and rolls through wine-filled vaults, seeking an outlet in vain. His nose is a colour-study for painters; yes, on my word, a real colour-study. It is of good size, and has every variety of shade ranging through purple, red, and blue. It is a marvel! In the summer this gentleman walked about, attended by two young servant-maids, both strong and healthy, and both crowned with red silk handkerchiefs. These carried his walking-stick and painting apparatus—for he is an artist, of course, and paints wonderful pictures, all green and blue, as unlike nature as anything is possible to be. They also provide him amusement when he is fatigued."

Here, the three-cornered smile appeared and deepened on my neighbour's face. "The amusements are as original as the man," he continued, chuckling. "They always consist of athletic exhibitions. He makes his girls fetch and carry like dogs, or jump over stones, or across a stick which he holds out; sometimes he joins in the sport himself, vaulting over tables and chairs at wayside inns until fatigue stops him, then the maids carry on the fun by themselves."

"He must be mad!" I cried indignantly.

"He is English," replied my informant demurely but with twinkling eyes. "He was born in Italy, I believe, and owns a restaurant near some great town. This he lets, however, and spends the rent most joyously, as I can testify."

"Does he walk about here with two maids?" I asked.

"No," replied the German. "He left them in the Engadine. Most likely he will hire others for the winter; but you will not need them as a mark of recognition. The colour-study will be sufficient. It is a real masterpiece, an astonishing combination of inharmonious shades."

As a natural result, I looked out eagerly for this old gentleman, but for some days in vain. My German friend departed, and his story was well-nigh forgotten, when it

was brought to mind one night towards the end of a *table d'hôte* by a Voice—I spell it advisedly with a capital—such as I had never conceived possible from man.

It reverberated solemnly through the *salle-à-manger* like the deepest organ-note; nor did it seem to come from any person present, but from a vast cavern underground, some huge, mysterious void inhabited by ghosts and ghouls. And the Voice said:

"No, I would not insure *all* effervescing drinks. Not soda-water, for instance!"

As the contrast between the sepulchral tone and the words themselves was supremely ludicrous, a burst of general laughter followed, which rose louder and louder as one after another at table caught the infection and first tittered because their neighbour roared, then roared because they could not help themselves. Peal succeeded peal till the rafters rang, and as the last died away, the Voice spoke again from Hades, reflectively and slowly:

"Or ginger-beer!"

And instantly the senseless merriment broke out afresh. I speculated on the force of influences, laughing the while myself as heartily as any; and, as I speculated, the German's description of his Engadine acquaintance came back to me, and I leaned forward to see the originator of the excess. He was thoughtfully pouring out a tumbler of Chianti from a flask, and a shadow of the ruby liquid was cast upon the bluer portion of that famous colour-study for painters, which ranged through purple and red.

The Master of Maidens looked up from his occupation.

"Sir," said he, and the marvellous Voice rumbled and echoed above the tumult of many tongues, "that won't do! You make a great mistake. If you were to pull down a haunted house twenty times over, and rebuild it in a different locality each time—if you were to divide it into twenty cottages—it would remain haunted to the end. I know, Mr. Barrister, from bitter experience."

"Tell us all about it, Mr. Brace," suggested the gentle-

man addressed, who acted as president at his end of the table.

"Oh, yes; I daresay! Tell you all about it! Sir, I am a man with a conscience!"

"We don't doubt it in the least," said the barrister.

"With a heavy conscience, a restless conscience, a conscience that never will allow itself sleep, or me a moment's peace!" moaned the Voice.

"Confession is good for the soul, sir," remarked an American.

"Eh?"—the monosyllable was very doleful. "With you as Father Confessor? I doubt it, sir; I doubt it. You're too young and too d——d good-looking!"

And again the chorus of senseless merriment rose to a shriek and gradually died away. Then the Voice was heard, gallant in a ghostly fashion that made my flesh creep.

"Why not, madam?" it rolled. "Why not? Ladies must be obeyed under all circumstances whatsoever. Certainly, I will tell my misfortune, if *you* care to listen:

"When I came of age I inherited two houses from my father, the rents of which were to be my income, as they had been his. One, luckily, is profitable, rising in value; the other is a never-ceasing source of trouble. I say '*is*,' for, though long since passed out of my hands thank God, it plagues and bothers its present owners as it plagued and bothered me; which is saying a good deal.

"I am not going to tell you where this house was originally built; that has nothing to do with the question. It might have been in Russia, quite as well as in Japan or Mexico. What happens in one country at one time may happen in another country at another time, and the explanation of either will account for both, provided the causes of both are identical. That's logic, Mr. Barrister, ain't it?"

"Just so," said the barrister superciliously. "Was your father a solicitor, Mr. Brace?"

"He was," growled the Voice. "And can *you* tell me, sir, the difference between a solicitor and a barrister?"

"No, I can't," drawled the president.

"The same difference as between a crocodile and an alligator," roared the Voice angrily; and as the laugh turned against his victim, Mr. Brace poured out another tumblerful of Chianti and drank it off at a draught.

"Well, madam," he continued more gently, "this second house had come into my father's hands in the way of business. When clients could not pay their fees in cash he was sometimes willing to accept their dwellings instead. 'Buildings pay ten per cent., and are safe investments,' he used to say. I wish to goodness he had not been quite so sure; I'd have been so much the richer then. But, as he did not consult me, I knew nothing about the transaction until after his death, when the will was read. I first set eyes on the abominable swindle when I went to inspect the premises.

"I found a square, solemn edifice, overgrown with ivy, standing in the middle of a few acres of pleasure ground which had been utterly neglected for years. High brick walls divided the property from the rest of the world; within them you might fancy yourself the first or last man, according to taste, so complete was the sense of isolation. Foreign trees, rare shrubs, stumps of weather-stained statues, moss-grown fountains, and grass-grown walks, were sorrowfully suggestive of by-gone grandeur. Indoors it was much the same; echoing corridors, crooked staircases, unexpected rooms with painted ceilings in unexpected places, approached by unexpected ways. Upon my word, I felt odd as I tramped through them!

"'Ugh!' I exclaimed at last to the Caretaker, 'the house might be haunted!'

"'It *is* haunted, sir,' she returned quietly. 'But I'm used to it. Nothing will hurt me if I keep away from the Red Room after dark.'

"'Ah! the Red Room!' said I, looking at her (she was an old scarecrow); 'and which may that be?'

"She brought me into a large, bare apartment on the

ground-floor, where spiders had made themselves a paradise of dust and web. There was a long mirror opposite the fireplace, and the room was lighted by French windows opening on a terrace that ended on one side at the gravel sweep before the entrance, on the other at a wall and an iron door admitting into the fruit-garden. A dismal row of terra-cotta vases ornamented the farther edge of this walk, and a broken set of steps led down to a lawn where the grass had grown rank round a deep basin of stagnant water. The lawn itself was bounded by a thick row of laurels that hid the ivied outer walls. No one could cross the grass without leaving tracks as in a meadow; no one could enter or leave by the iron door because it was locked and the key in my possession; and I suddenly determined no one should escape by the great gate under the archway, through which I had driven in, for I would lock it and keep that key too, while I slept or watched in the Red Room that very night.

"The old woman turned pale when I told her my intention, which confirmed my resolve. How could I let a haunted house, unless I proved the tales were groundless? And how could I prove them except by experience? And the best way of assuring myself a good night's rest was by giving rogues no time for preparation. I would not allow the hag to say a word. 'For,' said I, 'I know nothing about the house or its antecedents, therefore imagination can scarcely run away with me; at all events, if it does, it will be in a new line.' Accordingly I bid her rig up a bed near the fireplace, to avoid the reflection of the mirror, and clear the spiders out, collect chairs and tables from the other rooms, and light a roaring fire to make the place more comfortable, whilst I drove back to town for provisions, candles, &c., and to fetch my pistols and my dog.

"Zamba was of Danish breed, slate-coloured, and fierce to every one but me. She loved me, poor unfortunate brute, as well as a woman might have done, and she disposed of her rivals more effectually. We were both in high

spirits when I returned with her about sunset. I sent the trap away, and, having locked the gates, instituted, with Zamba's aid, a thorough search of the premises outside and in. I knew nothing could escape her prying nose. She was amazingly curious; she examined every hole and corner of the grounds, tracking the rank grass near the pool in every direction. But she found nothing. Indoors it was the same; there were lots of dust, but, besides, not even a rat (except the housekeeper) in that accursed house from garret to cellar.

"I forgot to say, the weather was fine and clear for the time of year. The moon, too, was luckily at the full, and would shine on the terrace a good part of the night. Nature herself seemed inclined to aid me.

"When Zamba and I had finished our rounds, I took her into the Red Room. Here she was not quite so satisfied. She sniffed the air doubtfully once or twice, and looked inquiringly into my face; then she walked slowly to the window, looked out, came back to me, wagging her tail uncertainly, as if to ask, Is it all right? Her doubts were quelled for the moment when I reassured her by voice and caresses, and she stretched herself at full length on the hearth before the now blazing fire.

"The twilight was deepening, and the old woman, whom I had called to help in unpacking the stores, asked permission to go away. I told her to light two duplex lamps first, and place them in the two darkest corners of the room. She grinned approval of the precaution, but as, having obeyed me, she was about to vanish into cannier regions, she paused with the door-handle in her hand and said in a rapid whisper:

"'All the lamps and candles,' here she eyed the four I had ranged on the supper-table, 'in the world won't help you, sir, if you haven't plenty of matches. There's another box, sir, *and don't let it lie on the table!*'

"The door slammed behind her; next moment it opened again and she said:

"'But that won't help you either, for no one ever came out of this room alive after a night spent in it—*and no one ever will!*'

"She was gone. I picked up the matches from the floor, where she had flung them, and blessed her for the forethought, for I had forgotten to bring any with me, and as I put them in my pocket Zamba whined.

"'What's the matter, old girl?' I asked. 'You and I are going to have grand fun to-night, ain't we?'

"But she heaved a deep sigh and put her nose between her paws.

"Between eating, feeding Zamba, reading and smoking, time passed pretty quickly until ten o'clock. Then looking up I saw the full moon shining in at the long French windows. I thought I should like to stroll on the terrace, and calling Zamba I lit a fresh cigar and went out into the open air.

"Not a leaf was stirring; the moonlight fell on the dewdrops hanging on the long, limp blades of grass, so that each bead resembled a pearl, so pure, so soft was their radiance. Not a grasshopper, not a frog broke the stillness with chirp or croak. I never felt a silence so intensely in my life; yet it was not oppressive; it was like falling asleep—a sweet luxurious sense of repose. Even Zamba fell under the influence and walked quietly beside me, sometimes thrusting her nozzle into my hand courting caresses, or touching my fingers lightly with her tongue.

"I don't know how long we had been pacing the walk in this fashion, when Zamba cocked her ears.

"'What is it?' I asked her gently. She glanced quickly into my face and wagged her tail, then put back her ears and whined. I listened anxiously.

"And presently a full, sweet woman's voice began to sing—to vocalize. It seemed to come from the sweep before the door. There was nothing odd about it, nothing unusual. I thought a vagrant artist was singing on the chance of gaining pence, but that her voice was superior to most of the class—in fact, I never heard a better on any stage.

Sometimes the sound came nearer, sometimes it drifted farther off, as if the songstress were moving up and down before the house, to see if at any window there were signs of life. No words were distinguishable in the song; runs, trills, and sorrowful single notes of exceeding beauty followed one another, melodiously indeed, but with no regard to order—at least, I have not known a composition approaching that in structure. It carred me away. I listened and listened till my cigar went out, and listened still to the enchanting strains, now rising, now falling, as I imagined the woman approached or retired from the terrace. Suddenly it ceased.

"'Poor thing!' I said aloud, awaking as from a dream. 'We must give her some food and see what can be done for her. Come along, Zamba!"

"Zamba crawled after me. I remembered her reluctance next day. As I came into the Red Room I looked about for a half loaf and some fowl I had left from supper, and as I stooped to pile the food together, the song burst out again; but this time, as if the singer stood on the terrace, almost in the room.

"I did not turn at once, for the chicken would not balance on the loaf; when I did turn, the song had ceased, and to my utter amazement there was no one near the open window.

"'Hullo!' I said, 'that's odd!'

"Going to the threshold, I saw the terrace was deserted: then, for the first time, I recollected the great gates were locked, the keys in my possession, and that no living being could enter the precincts without my knowledge! Calling to Zamba, I ran out, intending to search the garden and shrubbery with her. She obeyed reluctantly; when I urged her forward she gazed piteously into my face and whined; and, on my persisting, she rose on her hind legs and placed her fore-paws on my breast. Poor brute! After that we went back together to the Red Room no wiser than we had left it. I looked at my watch as we came in. It was twenty minutes past twelve.

"Sitting down in the arm-chair I piled fresh logs on the fire. Zamba took up her old position on the rug, with her nose between her paws, and watched the window suspiciously. About ten minutes later, one of the duplex lamps went out, and Zamba rose slowly, growling angrily. The next instant the other lamp went out, and the dog, barking furiously, flew at Something which was coming in from the terrace. I saw the animal spring into the air about the height a man's throat would be from the ground. I saw nothing between me and the outer air except Zamba; the moonlight streamed full across the rank grass, the stagnant pool and the terrace, and no shadow intercepted its path to me. But Zamba certainly attacked Something, and as certainly, her body was immediately flung violently backwards, so that she fell at my feet dead, her neck hideously twisted and broken.

"I seized my pistols and fired at Nothing. One of the four candles on the table was put out. Remembering the old woman's warning, I laid one revolver down and tried to light the candle from another. Then, in the mirror opposite, for the first time I perceived Something. It was a Hand, pale and sinewy; it seized the revolver and carried it away. Another candle went out.

"'This is getting serious!' I said to myself, and I stuck the second pistol into my coat-pocket that I might relight the two candles at once. The others went out. I lighted them again. Once more two were extinguished; the second revolver was snatched from my pocket. The third candle went out. I snatched out the matches and lighted it, the other was extinguished. I relighted it, and so the game went on as fast as one candle went out I struck a match and lit it again, to be put out again, and so on *da capo*. I observed, too, that other Hands had joined that pale one, hovering and encircling in the air, now vanishing, now appearing and, repeated in the mirror, their number seemed countless. I was too excited to care much about them, as they had not, as yet, come very near; but the thought did occur to me: "How shall I keep them at bay when the

matches are exhausted? Will they strangle me in the dark?' My foot touched poor Zamba's body, and a cold chill ran over me; for, at the same time, I perceived the Hands closer to me than ever before; and their shadowy fingers had a cruel, gripping expression that didn't please me. I did not relish their proximity at all. The match-box was, now, nearly empty.

"'Come!' said I, aloud and firmly, 'I am going to stay here all night, and walk out of this room *alive* in the morning. Matches or no matches; candles or no candles; Hands or no Hands!'

"I sat down and lighted another candle. Presently the logs on the hearth fell apart. I kicked them together with some difficulty, for striking matches takes up a good deal of attention, and, notwithstanding my danger, the humour of the situation tickled me. Surely a more ridiculous night's work could hardly be imagined than that of lighting candles for ghosts to snuff out! If poor Zamba's body, with its twisted neck, had not proved a terrible reality underlying the apparent comedy, I could have laughed outright, but—*only three matches remained to strike!*

"'I *will* stay here all night,' I repeated doggedly. 'Light or no light; Hands or no Hands!'

"My assailants increased in number; the room was full of them, from floor to ceiling, all pale and cruel, all shadowy and indistinct, yet they did not touch me. I wondered at that, wondered what hindered them from strangling me at once as they had my dog, when I struck the last match and saw the last candle extinguished. I kicked the logs on the hearth; a shower of sparks flew into the air; and I was left in complete darkness, hemmed in by those horrid, pallid Hands. That was a terrible moment, but my blood was up.

"'I stay HERE!' I cried furiously. 'Hands or no Hands; matches or no matches; candles or no candles; and I WILL walk out of this room alive in the morning!'

"The Things paused in their advance. Only for a second, however; the next they were circling and hovering, all

pearing and disappearing in their old fashion, making horrid dives at me, like a flock of hellish birds hungering to pick my bones. Still I was not daunted. Having observed that my enemies advanced as my courage failed, and fled when I was bold, I concluded that my will preserved me, and that, should it fail or falter, Zamba's fate would certainly be mine. Accordingly I resisted every impulse of fear. Leaning back in my chair, I waited for the morning, and thought the dawn would never break. Sometimes drops of exhaustion and nervous apprehension stood on my forehead, as imagination pictured those cruel, fleshless Hands behind me, their long, pale fingers, perhaps, in the act of clasping round my throat; and, at such moments, the Things thronged thicker, faster towards me, till checked by my strong determination. Half a lifetime seemed crowded into those few hours.

"At last, as my strength was giving way and hope failing, a grey look came into the sky; a slow, soft breeze stole through the trees in the shrubbery, and a cock crew. The pale Hands swept towards me in angry crowds—I gave myself up for lost—they disappeared."

The Voice paused. We waited in breathless silence.

"The shock of relief was too great for me, madam. I must have fainted; for, when I became conscious, the dawn had fully broken. I was lying on the floor across poor Zamba, and my old hag of a housekeeper was peeping in at the open window.

"She screamed when she saw me get up—the old goose—but, to do her justice, she was glad enough to find me alive. She brought me tea—I preferred brandy—to make me more comfortable; but she could do nothing for Zamba! Poor Zamba!"

Mr. Brace stretched out his hand for the Chianti, and as he poured out the last glass he continued:

"Now, madam, this is how my conscience became burdened. On inquiry I found that *every* room in the house was haunted by different kinds of apparitions; and so were the walks in the grounds. The voice I had heard singing was the pleasantest

and most harmless of the whole lot. I could not stand that, you know. One spirit might be put up with, but fifty or sixty—no thank you! I sold my inheritance to a contractor on condition he pulled it down. He in his turn sold the stones and bricks to a builder, who ran up a row of neat two-storied villas near a manufacturing town, using them as material. They let splendidly at first, not so well the second year, worse the third, and *not at all the fourth. For the whole lot, madam, are haunted. The pale Hands and all the ghosts in my big ghost-shop are now carrying on their nightly games in the respective villas where the stones and bricks of their respective homes were used up.* Except the songstress; she sings up and down the road instead of up and down my terrace."

"But how is your conscience troubled?" asked the lady.

"It is naturally tender," moaned the Voice. "It cannot bear the thought of having, unintentionally, been the originator of so much misery in the world as must be caused by letting loose so many apparitions. Hence it gives me no rest."

"Then you believe, Mr. Brace, the ghosts went with the bricks?" said the barrister.

"Sure of it," replied the Voice sorrowfully. "And more: every place built with old material is likely to be haunted, for what do contractors care where their bricks come from, so long as they are cheap? That's how we hear of unaccountable ghosts in brand new villas, and why so many of them are dangerous. They don't like having been disturbed, you see."

"Very curious!" said the barrister musingly.

"I *think* I've heard about the Hands before," remarked the American. "Were you ever in Russia, Mr. Brace?"

"Sir," growled the Voice, "you are an uncommonly sharp young man—a credit to your nation, sir. But tell me first why you are not a donkey's tail."

"Why I am not a donkey's tail," repeated the American. "Can't say, I'm sure. Because he ain't my brother?"

"Because you are no end of an ass, sir!" thundered the Voice; and the old gentleman pushed back his chair from the table and left the *salle-à-manger*.

A VERY QUEER INN.

Just as that invariable setting sun which so often ushers a traveller into a story-book was sinking to rest below the horizon, I came in sight of the country inn which was to shelter me for the night.

Inns on a solitary wayside present the same desolate appearance which is noticeable in a stray lamb or a lost child. One ruminates whether they have no expression equivalent to the cry of a child or the bleat of a lamb. These inns are as solitary as Stonehenge. Once the altars of hospitality, they are now mostly visited by the curious.

The inn of Baytown stood near no bay, and only a very untravelled yokel would be likely to call the village close to it a town. The inn was a brown patch on the top of a slope; gray lights from the east fell hard upon it, while the crimson glory of the west slanted off to the distant landscape, and drew every warm tinge away from the village hotel. Immediately I conjured up all those dismal stories whose focus of action centres upon these wayside inns.

However, the dipping sun seemed to be delaying its downfall, so that I might reach my destination under its patronage, just as a spluttering candle will sometimes flare up desperately to accommodate a reader to the last line but one of his book.

I was not insensible to the luminary's attention; I would not make light of it while it made light for me. I quickened my horse's pace and soon drew rein before Baytown inn. Then the red globe departed in presence, and left only its train of effulgence behind. Evidently earthly monarchs have taken counsel of the celestial one, since they allow their personal splendour to stream off into gorgeous retinue.

But no earthly monarch disports the colours of his court

in so wide an arena as the horizon across which the pompous sun swept his train. Serried troops of clouds moved superbly in the haze of his departed majesty, and to its shimmer reached the tallest trees, and their topmost leaves caught the glow of royalty, and shone like bits of burnished gold.

I might have reflected upon the beauty of the scene to an unlimited extent, for I find that the habit of reflection is thus much akin to the habit of smoking—it grows upon one insensibly. And as it is usual to have more than one cigar in a case, so it is usual to possess two or three forms of reverie in the mind. My thoughts were cut short, however, by an ostler, who came out of the inn and laid his hand on my horse's bridle with an air of appropriation. He said,

"Fine to-day, sir; wet to-morrow."

"Well," said I, "how do you know that?"

"See those clouds over there, sir! Bless your heart, not that way, but where the sun *doesn't* shine. Pretty closely banked together, you see, sir. Blue as mouldy cheese. Well, if they don't bust to-morrow, I never see a storm. Come in, sir. 'Good stabling for horse and man,' as the poet do say."

"This is a dead-alive place," I remarked irreverently.

"Not a bit, sir, not a bit. Twice a week the people pours past here on their way to Wookle, which is two miles off. And they pours back again—in the course of nature, which keeps a river wet at its source, as my father used to say. 'Twouldn't be much of a river, I suppose, that filled the sea and got dry at its rise. 'Charity begins at home,' as my mother used to say."

"Perhaps you can tell me what your grandmother used to say?" I asked amiably.

The ostler gave me a sly glance.

"She said, sir, according to my memory, that civility were its own reward. But, to my thinking, civility comes all the easier when there's something to wash it down, digestive like."

"You don't look like a teetotaller," said I, fumbling in my pocket, while I scrutinised the ostler's red nose. "Is there

anybody human beside yourself here? because, if there is, I should like a room and a meal."

"Master is down with the pigs," said the ostler, fingering my remembrance with supple fingers. "And Simon, I don't know where Simon is, sir. Here, Simon," he cried, lifting his voice and shouting into vacancy, "you're wanted."

The sound died away without an answer to meet it; profound silence ensued for the space of three minutes, at the end of which time the ostler said,

"I don't think he's coming, sir."

"I don't think he is," said I.

Imagination must have been rife to dream that any creature was coming in the utter stillness, save a bluebottle fly, which whisked through the air and settled on my nose.

"Can't you take me in yourself?" said I, as the ostler put up his hands in preparation for another volley.

The man dropped his hands with alacrity.

"Course! Come along, sir, this way. Perhaps you wouldn't mind getting out of the way of that goat. It always butts at strangers, poor thing."

I willingly consented not to mind, under apprehensive circumstances, though I conjectured whether I or the goat should be an object of pity. After stumbling over a plank, which sent my hat flying into a tub of dirty water, I arrived safely at the inn-door, with the goat in my rear.

"Why, in the name of thunder," said I inappositely, "do you keep a goat and a tub before your door?"

"Why, you see, sir," said the ostler, grinning, "one's a butt and the other butts. Singler and pluriel, as my schoolmaster used to say."

"Hang your schoolmaster!" I exclaimed testily.

"Can't, sir," retorted the ostler; "he's dead."

I picked out my drenched hat with a grace that was not suave, and followed the man into a room. There he left me, with the cheering assurance that if the reluctant Simon did not soon come the landlord himself would appear after he had disengaged himself from his pigs. Judging from

the silence of Simon's distant presence I prepared to fortify myself with patience, and began to look about me, and to investigate the place as if I were the man in possession.

The large gloomy room in which I sat seemed to have packed into it the ancient refuse furniture of the county. The chair which supported me creaked uneasily, as though to warn me that it was only warranted to bear the weight of a ghostly ancestor. An old looking-glass above the cracked mantelpiece had tearful tendencies, which induced dull deadened streaks down its would-be glossy surface; and some peacocks' feathers in two antiquated vases waved to and fro like the plumes of a hearse. Some old prints, entitled to the respect of age, but claiming no other respect whatever, backed against the wall, as though they were ready to retire from the scene, a sentiment on their part which did them credit; for they were atrociously executed, and the nearest approach to definite drawing was presented by a head and a tail separated by vacuum. A vivid imagination, ruralised, might discern in these salient features the suggestion of a frolicsome lamb. The sofa was pitted with a disease peculiar to rep and rosewood: a species of furniture smallpox. The ravages of this malady revealed a dirty white substance, which might have been taken from the pictorial lamb after it had tumbled in the gutter.

A chiffonier, crammed with photographs in every stage of consumptive complexion, and weighted by an enormous Bible, completed the chief furniture of the room. After taking stock of a stuffed dog, a footstool, and two more chairs, elegantly frail, the inventory was complete.

I heard a knock at the door; it was very feeble, very uncertain. I shouted out, "Come in!" for it seemed to me that so unsubstantial a summons must need a vigorous reply in order to reach it. The waiter opened the door; his back was as weak as the wooden one which supported me. He appeared to have been dispossessed at some time of his spine; probably in infancy, for he achieved a variety of contortions that could only have been acquired after long

practice. He had the inbred ease of a caterpillar, and his hairy hands fostered the crawling illusion.

I saluted this flexible human, as he opened the door and crept round the edge of it to the inside, with a quiet, "Well, sir?"

"Well, sir?" repeated the waiter, staring at me very hard indeed, as if I had him under examination, and he was trying to gauge my profundity.

"Well, sir?" I reiterated, waiting to hear what he would say next.

"Well, sir?" he repeated, as if he were waiting for the same thing too.

"Have you nothing to say for yourself?" demanded I.

"No, sir," answered the man, with exasperating submission.

"Nothing!" I cried warmly.

"Missis told me to ask you whether you meant to stay here all night."

"Is that what you call having nothing to say?" asked I.

"Bless you, sir, I haint," replied the waiter earnestly. "I never have anything to say, not of my own."

I looked at the man with sudden compunction, as at one whose speech, like his time, belonged to other people. He noticed the glance, and was going to shrink away, when I called him back.

"You may tell your mistress I mean to stay the night. And—what is the matter?"

For my waiter had begun to cry.

I looked at him in the silence of astonishment. I was uncomfortable. I shut my eyes, to open them again with a sense of reality. There was no need for the test. This waiter of a wayside inn had already displayed to me two uncommon accomplishments: he undulated and he cried; and he did both with the ease of habit.

I put my hands in my pockets. There is no other attitude which so fully expresses the master of the situation. I felt like a very small First Napoleon.

"Now, my man," said I, "what do you mean by this? If you are a knave, I shall find you out; if you are a fool——."

"Bless you, sir," interrupted the waiter uneasily, "I haint insane. But the house is chock-full, as I live. All of us sleep here; we never have strangers what stop."

"And yet your mistress sent to ask me if I meant to stop all night?"

"She didn't, that's it!" cried the waiter, writhing in a frenzy of grief, as if I had stamped upon all his nerves at once. "She said you could not stop all night; but I forgot, I made a mistake; I—O dear!"

"Don't be a fool," I said. "What room in this place do you call your own, because——."

The man petrified me with a stare. Then he said slowly,

"I go anywheres, sir. I haint anything in this world; leastways, not o' mine."

This was the sublimity of the ridiculous. They are not only next door to each other; they can fall into each other and make ruins. I was impelled to change the purpose which I had before resolved on when I had started in the morning for Baytown inn.

"Never mind about my bed-room," I said briskly. "Where is the top loft?"

I looked straight at the snaky figure and the washed-out eyes, receiving in return only a puzzled expression, which revealed nothing, and seemed to have nothing to reveal.

"Come, you know it," I said persuasively.

But this last effect was lost by the appearance of another figure in the doorway—a figure stout and sleek and well proportioned, whose thick round head was thrust into a soft felt hat, which was trying not to burst its seams asunder under the pressure. It had so far failed as to bulge into several awkward holes.

"Are you the proprietor?" I asked of this third masculine apparition.

"Guess so," he replied, with a jolly roll on the last word. "Fat enough for the place, ain't I, sir?"

He did not wait for an answer, but, seeing some symptom of jocosity in his remark, which had totally escaped me, he began to laugh with the vehemence which makes one think of a fit. The waiter had ceased to cry; the landlord was laughing; I could not assume an impassive air.

The last gamut died away at length, and mine host inquired if I wanted anything.

"I want a bed-room," said I, with some hesitation. Perhaps the landlord could cry as well as his man.

"Bed-room ready," promptly replied the landlord. "Here, you Wriggler, go and tell your missis to be quick."

The Wriggler departed, and I began with,

"Your man——."

"A little soft—ha, ha!" said the landlord, rubbing his hands in a cheerful way. "We are all soft somewhere, eh, sir? Some in the head; some in the heart. Now, my place is in the heart."

I congratulated the landlord on the happy locality of his tender spot, and asked him if there was only one bed-room for travellers in the house.

"Only one, sir. Our trade depends on the market-people. We are not often favoured with a gentleman of your evident ability, sir. Ha, ha! There's a garret, sir, where they say you can have a fine view of the moon. Ha, ha, ha! We call it the top loft, sir."

I asked myself how a man could laugh so much at nothing, and for answer found myself laughing too. We joined our peals together, and made a chime which might have convinced a misanthrope that we were convulsed with overpowering wit.

"Well, that's a good joke," said my landlord, rubbing his hands with the satisfied air of a man who had just made a bargain.

"Capital!" echoed I.

"One doesn't get that sort of thing every day." My landlord spoke like a connoisseur.

"No, nor every other day," said I cordially.

"You're a good judge, sir, if you know as much about wine——."

I accepted the delicate hint, and before long mine host and I sat opposite to each other in a small parlour, with a bottle of claret between us, which no more separated us than a galvanic battery divides the people who are holding on to its wires.

I had a purpose in my conversation with the landlord; there were times when I doubted whether he had not a purpose with me. Through the bursts of his exuberant mirth I caught now and then a stray glance, which was distrustful, sharp, anxious. But one cannot draw a flash of lightning as it passes, and I could not transcribe definitely on my mind the glances which aroused me.

We sat and talked long. I persisted in chatting until my dinner was ready. The landlord was not so willing to stay as I was to keep him. He took an immense interest in my dinner, and left the room several times to overlook it. I waited for him to come back, and on the principle of attraction, by which a strong will galvanises a weak one, he came back, always with a joke upon his lips. I laughed so much to accommodate him, that I began to long for the serenity of a meal. But my mirth and my conversational powers had as yet been wasted, and I had not arrived at the consciousness of a well-earned repast.

Yet I had made minute inquiries. With the enthusiasm of an antiquary, I had asked for a history of the old inn about me. The landlord gave it freely. I inquired if he would allow me to look through it. With affability he promised me an inquisitorial visit after dinner. But before dinner——. For once my baffled faculties hoped that a meal would prove suggestive instead of soporific.

As it progressed in the large ghostly room, which I had first entered, I meditated on several plans of circumventing the landlord. It is always difficult to fathom jollity; one has much more chance of unmasking a serious shrewd man than of showing up an individual bulwarked with the

bonhomie of my jolly landlord. There was no air of mystery about him. It is proverbially possible to find skeletons in cupboards, where a fit darkness reigns. But to fish one up out of a steaming punch-bowl, the very reservoir of joviality, is scarcely to be expected of any man.

However, my task had been set me, and I had promised to execute it, with the suggestion that a sterner execution might be the result of it. I had, happily, no tremors, only an incertitude as to the best way of proceeding. Under this perplexity, for the first time in my life, I ceased to envy one living statesman.

My dinner was a good one, and I could not help appreciating the zeal of the landlord, as my palate warmed with fine flavours. For an out-of-the-way place the cooking was extraordinary, and was explained by the assertion of my landlord that he had been the pupil of a renowned *chef*. It is not easy to cherish suspicions against a man who gives you a good dinner; and after the Wriggler had corkscrewed away my last dish, I lit a cigar and slowly paced the room.

"The confounded dreamer!" said I, fondly apostrophising an absent friend. "He will find a ghost in his sugar-basin some day. Suspicious, indeed! Think of that mushroom omelette, and don't talk to me of suspicions. Pooh! a man with a firm mind can see at a glance that the idea was only the wildest conjecture."

At this resolute climax the door creaked ominously. My firm mind started on its well-balanced hinges. The door was not well-balanced at all; but it swung on its hinges, nevertheless, and revealed the Wriggler.

As an *habitué* of the place and its customs since five o'clock, I was not surprised that he did not speak. It was not even astonishing to find him staring at me meditatively for a second or two. I maintained that serene composure which any adept in the art of being photographed soon learns. With similar composure he scanned my features. But that he writhed continually, one might have taken him

for a petrified artist, absorbed in the sublime reverie of creating me on canvas.

I waited patiently for speech from the oracle. When it came, I was persuaded it would be worth hearing. Expectations are delusive; the Wriggler suddenly withdrew his face, and was about to latch the door outside. I interposed. He was quietly wriggling with the grace of a boa-constrictor in the middle of my room; my hand was tenacious of his coat-collar.

"Now," said I, with as much suavity as I could command, "you must explain to me your kind scrutiny of my features. You don't understand? Well, what is there in my face to stare at?"

"Missis wanted me to look at you," said the Wriggler.

It was quite evident that the man had no mind to pursue his mistress' behest, for he slid to the door with the subtle ease that oil trickles down a warm tin.

"Please," faltered the Wriggler, "missis didn't tell me to tell you I was to look at you."

"What of that?" I demanded.

"Don't tell her," replied the man. "If she knew I told you, she would be angry if you told her."

I consented to have nothing to do with these perplexing pronouns, and told the man to go away and mind his own business.

"Lor', sir," said he, in departing, "I hain't got no business, not o' mine."

This unexpected visit had upset all my comfortable theories of resolving my friend's arguments into dreams. Why should the Wriggler be sent to look at me? I was not a young man of Apollo-like appearance, nor at all calculated to impress the imagination even of a landlady. When acquaintances wish to pay me a compliment they find it easiest to congratulate me on the improvement in my general appearance if I mount a pair of eye-glasses. I appreciate their delicacy, while I guage it. Without a looking-glass it is possible for me to know that to produce effect I

must purchase it. No, the landlady's interest in my features could not be due to an admiration of them during any surreptitious glance which she might have obtained.

There was a mystery, without doubt—the waiter had convinced me on that score—and I set myself to brood over it in a methodical manner. But the landlord's jolly face interposed continually between me and my morbid fancies. How could such an appearance hold any horror in disguise? Impossible. And yet—ah, yet—I dropped into the depths of a reverie.

A reverie is the plantation where phantoms are raised. They spring up like the proverbial mushrooms, and they are the same sort of creation—dark, misshapen, flexible. It was too warm for a fire, or else a few burning coals heat the chill atmosphere of sickly fancies, and induce a current of fresh air through the mind. I stared at the fireless grate: I watched the flickering candles; I measured my shadow on the wall; I paced the room; I sat down on every chair; I even turned up the Bible, read attentively through Noah's family-tree, and having satisfied myself as to his extreme respectability, I drank to his memory.

Now, whether the wine fermented an idea, or whether the Bible supplied it, I never can determine. Certain it is that I returned to the latter, and turned over its leaves between the division that separates the Old Testament from the New. There another genealogy confronted me: of less ancient stock than Noah's, but of more interest to me on that account.

There were three pages inserted between the Old and New Testament, closely lined, and headed respectively with Births, Marriages, Deaths. This was a family Bible; and the compiler of it had provided lines enough to certify the names of as many children as Methuselah might have had during his thousand years of existence. There was provision made for forty births, forty marriages, and forty deaths. The supply, in all respects, was generous.

But generosity is one of those commodities which, like

charity, is often ill-bestowed. In this desert of a register there existed only one oasis of an entry in black ink—one on each page. They were written in a large anxious hand, which I easily traced to my landlord. One generally observes that these jovial uneducated men only exhibit anxiety when they sit down to write. I traced the register backwards. Of death there was one notice:

"Died, on the 20th January 18—, my mother, Elizabeth Ann Fern, aged seventy-six. Her end was peace."

Under the head of marriages this singular statement occurred:

"On the 10th September 18—, I, Thomas Fern, bachelor, married Mary Sexton, spinster, at the parish church, Baytown. May we never live to regret it!"

I turned to the births. There was one recorded:

"This day, the 9th August 18—, I, Thomas Fern, joyfully record the birth of a daughter. Her name is to be Lucy."

This announcement was dated eleven years past. I shut the Bible. These records were quite in the vein of my jolly landlord. They were simple and practical. I felt relieved again, and determined to see if the child was still extant, with the intent of having her in to amuse, after the fashion of an elderly man who likes children.

I walked out of my sitting-room, and, in the low passage outside, came into concussion with my first friend—the ostler. He was running through the house from back to front, and dashed against me, as if he thought I was an apparition, and expected to find me only a vaporous obstacle.

"Sharp work, sir," said he, rubbing his forehead where it had met mine.

"Particularly so," said I, trying to imitate his tone of cordial fraternity.

"That dratted goat has flied away, you see, sir, and I was——."

"Flying after it," said I comprehensively. "Very good! I should not expect anything in this place to follow the ordinary suggestions of Nature. Can I assist you?"

"Well, it's storming," said the ostler, in the reflective manner which I had observed before. "That 'ere goat's a regular Wandering Jew. You never seed the brain it has for travelling. It's my belief it's haunted."

The ostler dropped his voice to an impressive whisper.

"You don't mean it!" I said, looking mysterious.

"Fact, sir! Ever since——. But bless my heart, if I go out with a ghost to carry my thoughts for me, I shall never get down to Ditchley Pond."

"If the goat has such a remarkable bump of locality as you suggest," said I, "could it not find its way back again?"

"Bless your hinnercent mind, sir, the missis wouldn't rest a moment while that 'ere goat was flying about. Ever since——."

There was a pause again. I nodded encouragingly. "Yes; ever since——."

"No; that I won't!" cried the ostler, buttoning up his coat-collar with sudden determination. "'Tain't the sort of reflection for a dark night. Would you like to come, sir? I daresay it won't rain all the way to Ditchley Pond. That dratted goat always flies to the water like a poisoned rat."

"How far is it?" asked I hesitatingly.

"Something short of two mile, sir. I reckon a little more back, because the creature has to be pulled against its will. When a thing sticks its four legs into the ground square, you has an instinct that it have got two too many."

"Does your mistress expect you to go out in this storm after the goat?" said I.

"Hush-sh, sir! We never tell her it's lost till it's found. She'd be in that wandering way that runs between hysterics and a faint. I'll run him up in no time; and if you are afraid of spoiling the shine of your hat, sir, I wouldn't advise you to go with me, for those blue clouds are bursting their very skins."

I submitted to this kind consideration, and, out of respect to my hat, declined the wild goat-chase. The ostler nodded me a cheery good-night and opened the front door. There

was a rush of rain outside, and the wind, with wet skirts, trailed through the passage, and sighed and moaned.

I would have begged the man to delay his search until calmer weather; but he had shut the door and was gone. I opened it to call after him; there was no response, save from the heavy wind. I heard the ostler's feet racing through the dark night. Would he have told me the sequel of that "ever since——" if I had gone with him? Not he, after that resolution of voice and action. Besides, I had rheumatism, and avoided the rain from sheer instinct.

I determined to hunt out the mistress of the establishment. If she were as peculiar as the rest of its supporters, I thought the quartet of singularity would be complete. Besides, there was the child, and one seeks for a child by its mother's side, as one looks for seaweed on the shore of the ocean. I pursued my way through the irregular passage that ran from back to front, with a keen look-out ahead, lest the Wriggler should be also bent upon some express message, which might lead to some more sharp work, as the ostler expressively termed it.

The passage was dimly lighted, as for accustomed feet, and I stumbled twice over steps that occurred in the darkest recesses of the corridor. There were voices sounding, however, in the fore, and there was also a ray of light, which slanted through an open doorway; a light that flickered and waned and reddened, and came evidently from a fire. The voices drifted over the light; they were duo—the treble of a woman, the rougher utterance of a man.

I went cautiously along, but not stealthily; for when one is not very sure of one's reception, there is nothing like footfalls to presage an introduction. Evidently my boots served this purpose; the voices suddenly stopped. I went on, pushed farther open the already opened door, and stood before my landlord's wife and the Wriggler. The Wriggler had been under cross-examination; there was the evidence of restraint and anxious memory upon his face. He welcomed my advent with relief, and looked at the door as



A woman who could have compelled respect in any society.

a felon looks at the "Way out" for the public thoroughfare. The woman before me rose as I made my unceremonious entrance. I had purposely avoided knocking; but the purpose was not sufficient to extinguish my annoyance at having committed a breach of common courtesy, most especially as I looked at the landlady. I had expected to see a buxom dame of "marmish" manners and florid countenance. Instead, I saw a woman who could have compelled respect in any society. Her composure, the decision and repose of her massive olive-skinned face, the unconscious steadiness and dignity of her attitude, were impressive. My intentional discourtesy ceased to be atoned for by circumstances; her presence made the intrusion an unwarrantable liberty.

"I must really apologise," said I, with real earnestness. "My abrupt entrance cannot be excused by the only excuse I have to make—that I heard voices within, and wanted to speak to some one."

"It is no matter, sir," said Mrs. Fern, looking a little surprised. "I am quite ready to speak to you, sir, if there is anything I can do for you. Simon, you may go."

The accent of this speech was Scotch; that nativity explained some portion of the landlady's manner. Simon, the Wriggler, went with alacrity, and was so jubilant over his escape, that he ventured the suggestion of a wink at me.

"Are you lonely, sir?" asked Mrs. Fern, with a smile, which showed to advantage on her thin crisp lips.

"Rather eerie, I think," said I. "You will understand a native word."

"You catch a Scotch twang in my speech," she said; "but I am not Scotch, though my father was. He was a superstitious man, and used to make *me* eerie with his tales of fays and goblins upon the winter mountains."

"That sort of education should develop here," said I. "One could swear to a legion of spirits round this house. Are you nervous?"

"Not a bit," said she, with a cheery laugh. "Nor are you, sir; only uncommonly impressionable for a man."

"You have a taste for photography," said I, smiling. "It asserts itself here as well as in your drawing-room."

"Ah, sir, that is my husband. I hate litter, and like every bit of mahogany to show off its polish, as long as there is any. But my husband has an odd fancy to keep brittle stuff everywhere, and he wouldn't part with those photographs for all the fine pictures that were ever painted."

"That is a hobby," said I.

"No, begging your pardon, sir," Mrs. Fern answered, "it is a soft heart. Didn't he tell you he had a soft heart? Well, it's true, though people are not often correct about their characteristics, to my thinking. Things soon get valuable to him by association; and he keeps more than one silly trifle because he has kept it before, for some forgotten reason. I hate litters; but he humours me, and I must humour him."

"I don't know whether I ought to condemn your sex, even to make you an exception, Mrs. Fern," said I. "But women are not generally as fair as you in giving and receiving."

"Are you married, sir?" asked the landlady; and her shrewd placid face, as it surveyed me, made the question perfectly becoming.

"Not I," said I, laughing. "Never had a fancy yet, except for cigars. Do you believe it?"

"No," she said quietly. "I don't." The voice was resolute, but there was not a sign of curiosity upon her face. She turned the subject, not abruptly, but by a leading route.

"I was going to say, sir, that only a married man has a chance of knowing how much a woman can give and give in without seeming to do either. You must not reckon yourself a judge, sir, if you will pardon my saying so."

"Thank you for setting me straight," I answered. "I recognise you as an authority. But am I detaining you as much as I am keeping you standing? Your husband promised to let me see some rooms in the house after dinner."

"He will be here in a minute," Mrs. Fern replied. "Won't you sit down, sir? Simon, where is George?"

This latter was addressed to the Wriggler, who had crept into the room with some coals. While I wondered that so dignified a woman should ask a servant about her husband by his Christian name, she turned to me with an interpretating glance and an amused laugh.

"Not my husband, sir, but the ostler!"

I bowed instinctively, and began to be afraid lest my purpose should be discernible to this quick-eyed woman. In my conversation with her I had forgotten it, and this reminder made me feel ill at ease.

The Wriggler stood blankly still, coals in hands and mouth agape. His mistress betrayed no impatience, but said decisively,

"Are you silly, Simon?"

The nursery tale which used to beguile my childhood with pictures and verses, anent an acute pieman who refused Simon a pie without a penny, here came vividly to my mind. I laughed, and the landlady heard me.

"Pray excuse me," said I apologetically. "It is only another instance of photography which I will explain to you in a moment."

"You have not forgotten the nursery, sir," said she smiling. "Simon, where is George?"

The poor Wriggler trembled, and I could divine the cause of his agitation after the ostler's remarks.

"Well, Simon?" said his mistress, with asperity.

"He's out," burst forth the unhappy waiter, wringing his hands and shooting the coals forth right and left.

"Good luck, man!" exclaimed Mrs. Fern, seizing the shovel-handle and stopping the downfall. "Are you quite daft?" She threw the coals on the fire, and then petrified the Wriggler with another question: "Why has George gone out? He will get drowned in this deluge."

The Wriggler faltered miserably. He stuttered and broke into a palpable falsehood:

"Please, 'm, I don't know."

His mistress dismissed him, with an uneasy expression upon her face.

"One can never judge of that poor fellow," she said to me. "He generally seems to tell a lie when he speaks the truth; and when he does venture on a falsehood he manages to assume a plausible air."

I asked myself if she were trying to deceive herself or me. Her calm straightforward face rebuked my suspicions.

At this moment my landlord entered. He nodded at me, and rolled out a jolly—

"Evening, sir. How did you like your dinner?"

"Never ate a better one," I answered. "You are a master of combinations."

"I served under a good master, you see, sir. What is the matter, missis? You don't look spry to-night."

"George has gone out," said the landlady, in a distrustful tone.

"Has he?" said Mr. Fern, stooping down low to tie up a bootlace. "Well, it's a mercy he's weather-proofed, ain't it? There's enough water to-night to drown any one with warmer blood than a fish."

"Why has he gone out?" asked his wife.

"Couldn't swear," replied the landlord, still busied with his bootlace. "He's one of the sort that has whims. Best to leave whims to break out free, like small-pox or scarlet-fever, I say."

This liberal view of the subject did not seem to satisfy Mrs. Fern. I saw that a question trembled on her lip, which she once or twice resolutely repressed. I should have retired in order to afford her the liberty of making it, but that her husband was evidently afraid of meeting the demand. He seemed anxious to keep me there, and told his wife to get out some of her own particular cordial, which he warranted would warm a corpse back to life. I suggested that it was a wonder his house was not besieged for so marvellous an elixir, and he laughed, and asked me, as a future corpse, to give my opinion of the liquor.

It was excellent—sweet as Noyeau, almost as fine-flavoured as Chartreuse; and as I mentioned Chartreuse I was forthwith led into telling a legend of an old monk, who had divulged the secret of a famous liqueur, and whose retribution was devised by his fellows. He was allowed to take nothing but the liquor until he died. "Best way of being starved I ever heard of," ejaculated the landlord, and he went to put a wedge of wood into a shaking window.

And during this time the storm grew in passion and intensity. There was a wild animus in its strength; there was almost personal spite in its clamours at the doors and windows. The landlady's face got whiter, and her thin lips almost disappeared in the pressure with which they met. Her husband drank the cordial, held it up to the light and admired its colour; but he laughed uneasily.

I was anxious to introduce the topic of the child, and yet knew not how. Mrs. Fern wore a black dress, but there was no crape upon it; and above its blackness, no sign of mourning about it. Neither were there any signs of childhood in this living-room. I looked vainly for a doll, or a toy, or a ribbon, or a shoe. Where, then, was little Lucy Fern? On a visit? in her bed? Surely not. That man and woman had no air about them which bespoke the caresses of a child. And on such a fearful night as this, no child could be left alone; no mother, with the evident tenderness of Mrs. Fern's disposition, would fail to be by the cot of the house, and to make a warm presence there through the desolate and resounding darkness.

I drank two glasses of cordial, and my landlady was pressing another on me, when there came a tap at the back door; and thither went the landlord. George followed his master into the kitchen, and in the rear came the Wriggler, supported by his fellow-servant's presence. Mrs. Fern was holding the bottle over my little glass when they entered; she put it down again.

The landlord took off his hat and put it on again: this served to pass the first awkward moment. Mrs. Fern

scanned George thoroughly. He was wet from head to foot, and rain-drops trickled from his heavy eyebrows down his broad flat face, and some of them entered his gaping mouth.

"Well, George," said Mrs. Fern rather shortly, "I should have thought you had had enough of water without swallowing it! Come near the fire, man, and let us look at ye."

George advanced, an unwilling spectacle. I could not help smiling. The wiry ostler was deluged, his short coat was patched with masses of wet, his cut-sleeves were twinkling with rain-drops; and he himself looked as if he had lost his identity—had become an amphibious creature, and was bewildered at his new condition.

"Why, man, ye're as daft as Simon!" said Mrs. Fern impatiently. "Is the water glueing your feet to the floor? What possessed you to go out this night?"

There was silence. The landlord returned to his bootlace; the Wriggler began to slide to the door; George kept his ground, but bent his head and looked at the floor. I was an interested spectator of this sudden tableau. Mrs. Fern's brow clouded; into her clear grey eyes there stole a hot mist, and she half turned away and opened a cupboard-door.

"Of course," she said, in a low troubled voice. "I knew it must be that. George, have you brought it back?"

The question was spoken in a different tone from the soliloquy. There was a breath of defiance in it; and the woman faced the ostler inquiringly.

"Yes, mum," said George. "I didn't want you to know about it until I brought it back; but that Wriggler is always a burstin' of himself with a secret, if it is no bigger than a sparrow's egg."

Mrs. Fern took up the bottle of cordial again. Her hand was not as steady as before, but she managed to pour me out my glass. Then she produced a tumbler, half filled it, and gave it to the ostler.

"Take that, George, and go to bed, and Simon shall dry your clothes: you're a good lad. And the goat's all right?"

"He ain't too ill to be obstinate," said George, smiling assuringly. "Not a soul can manage that rampageous animal since——."

"Hush!" said the landlord. "Enough of that. Don't stand shivering, my lad; you can put off having rheumatism till you're as old as me."

George departed with a general good-night, followed by the Wriggler. A strange gloom had fallen on mine host, and mine hostess looked stern and sad. I could make no inquiries that night, and asked, instead, for my candle. Mrs. Fern gave it to me, and offered to show me to my bed-room. It was still early, but I had no mind to face the sepulchral parlour again. Mine host bade me good-night and hoped I should sleep well, and I returned the compliment. Mrs. Fern preceded me up-stairs, opened a door, and hoped that I should be comfortable. I replied suitably, and was left alone with my candle, my bed-room, and my reflections.

This new chamber was situated exactly over the parlour, and was of the same dimensions and the same dreariness. The furniture was still more worn than that below-stairs, and the huge bedstead stood like a stranded ark in the middle of the apartment. I walked across the worm-eaten floor to the place where my small knapsack stood, and began to undo the straps; they creaked, but something else creaked, and I sprang to the door and opened it wide, to find nothing. There was an old key in the lock, too rusty to turn; there was no bolt to the door; and the only protection I could devise consisted in placing a chair against the door and on the chair two tin candlesticks, so that any one wishing to enter must perforce enter with a noise.

The storm was getting madder every moment. I pulled up my blind and peered into the deluged country through the window. The rain dashed against it in heavy splashes; but in the intervals I could see a sombre landscape, in which the draggled trees stood like giants, melancholy and forlorn. A few lights were dotted about the village, and the wind

made them shiver as it passed over them to grapple with the trees in furious gusts of spasmodic strength. The view without was suicidal in its influences. I turned again to the one within. Except that the room was dry and sheltered, it was scarcely more cheering than the miserable landscape. I held up my candle and glanced round me. There was but one picture on the wall. It was a photograph enlarged and coloured: the photograph of a very prétty child, with light-blue eyes and curling flaxen hair. And the face boded the firmness of Mrs. Fern, together with the good-humour and frankness of her husband. This must be the child whose birth was registered in the family Bible. She looked about seven years old, but the intelligence of her large eyes and wide brow spoke of a mental growth beyond the proportion of the physical. I was not surprised at the unusual brightness of this child; her mother was a remarkable woman, repressed by ordinary circumstances. Even a sculptor would show no recognised talent if he had only cast iron to mould. And the circumstances of Mrs. Fern's life were not such as to give her scope for the expression of a resolute and original character. In some volcanic era she might have stood as to the burning-bush, illuminated with all its fiery passions, even the focus of them, while she remained erect and unconsumed.

Yet these forces of character are seldom wholly lost, though they be concealed. The young child at whose portrait I was gazing had the prophetic air of one whose way in the world would be signalled by phosphorescent footprints, and whose speech, when it fell, would be clearer than the mumble of the crowd. Where was she, this child? Did not her mother love her with that affection which a mature mind conceives for one cast in the same mould, still undeveloped, but giving hints of power lying within the measure of its growth, as a young science prophesies material of wonderment for coming ages?

I could not go to bed while the storm still raged. There was a sofa in one corner, and I wheeled it close away from the wall, and lay myself down and listened to the demo-

niacal breathing of the storm. With a hundred eerie voices it shrieked past my window and sent a passing blast down the chimney. With a thump and a twirl and a skurry like a Highland reel gone mad, the dervish wind played its blustering pranks till it moaned like a spent thing, and sobbed with the reaction of its furious anguish.

Under such influence I fell asleep, and the last face I had seen came to me—a little face, the crowning of a slender delicate form; a little face with pleading eyes, and earnest visage, and determined lips and brows; a straight slim creature, that held out its hands to me, and the rain-drops fell from them drearily. I tried to touch it, but I could not; it shrank from my approach, and still entreated me when I left it; and when I gave up all hope of holding it in my grasp, it came and whispered close to my ear with wet cold lips that it was wandering, ever wandering. Unhouseled and tormented, restless and tired to death, it sought for peace, and yet could not find a clod of mother earth that would cover it and keep it warm.

The wan eyes pleaded for sleep, the young worn face wanted a yielding pillow, the little body strained with sickening pilgrimage was all a-quiver for a couch whereon to lay its limbs.

I could not touch it nor speak to it—it went. And darkness followed it and overspread me, and dreamless slumber came upon me, wherein lies the monotony of unconsciousness.

Something awoke me, I could not tell what. I sprang to my feet with that bewildering sense which comes from startled awakement, that I must act in a crisis without knowing what the crisis might be. Gradually my nerves regained vitality. What had awoke me? There was not a sound in the house. And yet, was there not? In acute states of sensitiveness one seems to feel sound rather than to hear it. I knew that there were footsteps moving not many paces off. I looked at my watch: it was one o'clock in the morning. I had slept for three hours. And again I listened. There were steps approaching close to my door. Double

footsteps; two people, and one was the onerous tread of man, the other of light-footed woman. I looked at the door, expecting to see it burst open, with a shock of tin candlesticks, and Heaven only knows what other shocks besides. But my door remained unmoved, and I advanced to it swiftly and laid my head against the keyhole. A woman's dress rustled. Mrs. Fern's voice whispered sadly,

"Dear Thomas, not to-night! O, not to-night!"

"Ay, to-night," answered the landlord, in a dogged sullen tone that I could scarcely recognise as his. "Go you to bed, my lass, and I will fetch a light."

"How can I go to bed? Thomas, you are mad. Not to-night, dear Thomas. You have not the nerve."

"Go you to bed, lass. Go back, lass. Leave me alone; I'm going to get a light."

I heard the heavy footsteps descend and the lighter footsteps ascend. There was a dead silence, in which twenty fancies rose like night shades in my mind. One minute contained the materials for a hundred lives. A hundred lives are lived through sixty years each, with less emotion, less incidents, than were crammed into that minute of absolute inaction.

The candle had burnt to the socket; at the same time I was conscious that the storm no longer raged. I drew up the blind, and from the broken sky, worn as it were to pieces, the moon beamed calmly. That most imperturbable light has no heart of fire in it; it makes use of a quintessence of devouring flame only to radiate its surface—like many a stoical nature, that basks in the fame of a great name, and has no sympathy for the genius that creates it.

Nevertheless, that reflected light was next best to having a new candle, which I had not. Mine was flickering out fast. Since I could not carry the moon about with me, I would have foregone the universal radiance for the sake of having an ordinary dip. Still, I thought one might be worse off without a moon. I waited for some time, and heard no sound. Perhaps my landlord had found the queen

of the night effulgent enough to make a candle unnecessary. I opened the door, and stood in the dark passage. Presently footsteps came along the corridor downstairs, and no light came with them. The footsteps came nearer, and up the stairs. Before they reached the landing on which my door opened I had retreated behind it, and had shut it.

A pause of the heavy feet, and then they went on upwards, and my mind carried my body after them; for, with a sudden resolution, I turned into the black stairway, and followed my landlord in my stockinged feet. He stayed a moment at the next landing in the darkness, and his wife came to her bed-room door and entreated him to rest. He answered her doggedly, bade her back to her bed, shut her door after her, and went on. I went on. A slight twist in the landing showed a steep ladder, whitened by the moon, that streamed through a small window. My landlord sped up this as agilely as if he were not stout. I watched him to the top of it. He unclosed his hand, and put a key in the door that fronted the ladder. The lock turned noiselessly, and he went in, leaving the door ajar. Up that ladder I crept carefully. I was not so corpulent as the landlord, but my feet blundered and were not certain.

I reached the top without making a sound. Then I pushed open the door, and stood within a room that I knew was the top loft.

In one moment I saw its peculiarities; in another I saw its mystery. The moonlight was radiantly cold within its compass; there was nothing unrevealed. It showed an attic with a lean-to roof, and the rafters above were rough and splintered. It lit up, with the height of contrast, black hangings that were nailed against the walls. It shone into the empty, blackened, ill-shaped room, and lay upon the pile of a red rug that covered the centre of the floor; and upon a box with silver handles raised high in the midst; and upon an old man grovelling before it in a posture that was too undone for kneeling and too utterly debased for devotion.

And I, with senses alert, and with cold veins, moved a

heavy step further into the room. My landlord sprang to his feet, and stood before me, and looked at me, and spoke no word. I spoke.

"You are found out at last, Mr. Fern," I said.

He looked at me, and waited for the words to form sense within his brain. Then, with a sigh and with unmoved acquiescence,

"Yes, at last."

I scarcely knew what to say next: the man did not defy me; he only looked nonplused.

"The law has reached you through me, Mr. Fern; you must submit to it."

"Yes, yes," he said quietly. "But I have duped it this three year come October."

"Great Heaven!" I cried; "can you talk coolly of your crime? Are you hardened to the most awful form of murder——."

"Eh, what?" said the man, dazed at the first word, and indignant and furious at the second. "I a murderer? Curse you! God judge you, sir, as you have foully judged me."

He laid his great hand upon my arm, and shook it. The tears were running down his face, while the deep curses of a broken heart thronged to his lips, and stayed there for powerlessness of utterance. I looked at him and at the silvered coffin and at the desolate room, and wrenched my arm from his grasp.

"Then, in the name of your Judge and mine, what is that?" I said, pointing to the sepulchral box.

His anger died; his passion was quenched; he covered his face with his hands, and groped his way to the little coffin, and laid his head upon it, and cried with words unintelligible some names of endearment that were framed in sobs. I felt a movement behind me, and turned to see Mrs. Fern. Her face was as white as the light that illuminated it, but the strength of her bearing was unshaken by the funereal room or the stricken husband. She had put on a

long gown, and beneath it her breath came and went quickly; otherwise the form of her mien was calm.

She looked at me and passed me, and went to her husband and put her arms round his neck. He moved to her touch, and laid his great tousled head upon her shoulder. The passion of grief which shook him showed the balance of that jovial temperament. She smoothed his face with her hand as if it had been a baby's; she bent over his head her indomitable one, tearless, tender, powerful. And, after a time, with a slight movement she brought his eyes and hers to the small window, and pointed to him the heavens, from which all clouds were drifting, where the serene rested deep blue between the glittering stars, and stretched backwards from this bright white moon.

He lifted his small eyes to her face with a curious expression, like the appeal of the dumb brute that begs for a translation of the feeling that it cannot give tongue to. There was no shade of sentimentality in Mrs. Fern's spoken answer to this mute speech.

"Why will you not look there instead of here?"

He turned back to the coffin, and hid his face from the suggestions of the far-away heavens. His words were thick, and his hoarse voice quivered.

"Because this is her. The bit of flesh I held is here; the lips I kissed are here; the cheek I loved is here. It is only the thing, you say, not the spirit. The spirit may be yonder, as cold and uncanny as those blessed stars. But 'twas the dear body that I nursed and loved. The bright eyes her blue eyes—I nailed them safe in here."

He nodded his head at me, and went on with a proud mournfulness I should not have expected of him:

"You called me a hard word, sir—a word that might tempt a man to be the vile brute you named. Your scent is mighty keen, sir, but it sniffed astray at the last. The demon that killed my child was Croup, and I kissed down her dead eyelids. You may go in the churchyard and see her name written on a gravestone, and you might have seen.

three years agone, a funeral there. They put a coffin in the ground, didn't they, wife? but it don't hold my darling."

He stood up straight now, and faced me with tremor, with eagerness. Grief and passion gave him eloquence, and his defence was warm.

"Do you think I would give my pretty one to the filthy worms, to eat out her eyes, and crawl into her ears, and feed on her lips? Do you think I would put her into the cold, the storm, and the sodden earth? Couldn't the old roof that had sheltered her lively living body cover her when she was so mighty still and gave no trouble? I read an old book that tells how to wrap up the dead, that they will keep at least for years. I made two coffins, one within the other, and put her on a soft feather bed inside them. And I shut her up and brought her here, and kept her here. And they buried an empty box yonder; and I and wife held another service here, without e'er a clergyman, but with our groans and tears.

"And the child was always frightened in a storm; I always come to watch when there is rain and wind. But to-night my lass persuaded me not to come because you were in the house. I waited, but my spirit wouldn't hold. I had to come, and I came at last, just to see her quiet, after the hullabaloo. And you came, sir; you've outwitted me. My lass is a keen lass, and she read somewhat in your face. You never married; you never lost a child. And you think it's easy to bury dead limbs out of your sight? But it ain't; Lord, it ain't. It's the heart-breakingest thing; it's—O Lord!"

His head bent over the coffin-lid again. I stepped to Mrs. Fern and whispered to her:

"Forgive me, I will leave you now. I will go to my room until morning. Will you see me then?"

She nodded, and I went.

A year later, I stood in the churchyard of Baytown, and with me stood George the ostler. The mortal remains of

little Lucy Fern lay then beneath the gravestone. I had gone to the clergyman of the parish after that stormy night. He had heard my tale with some professional horror and with much human sympathy, and he had lent his aid in conveying to its last resting-place the coffin of the top loft.

And a year after, George and I stood there together. The ostler rambled in his meditative style, while I listened:

"Bless you, sir, you did a sight of good to the master and missis. Queer whispers was always on the go. They never could be happy with a dead corpse a-corrupting of itself over their heads. As my mother used to say, the worms must live, and we ain't no right to stand against the natural food of a thing. Curious thing, Miss Lucy died in a storm; couldn't tell which howled the louder—it or master. Not missis, bless you, sir. She's one of that sort that chews her tears, reg'lar.

"That dratted goat was the plaything of Miss Lucy. It were always civil to her, and as sweet as an ass eating hay. But the night she died, it made off in the storm. The missis sent me after it; and when I had tugged it back, the little soul was dead. But the goat always goes astray now when there's a storm. The missis won't have it chained up, because of Miss Lucy; but she doesn't like it to go away, for she's got a fancy, her father taught her, that the child has a hold on the goat somehow—sort of unvisible reins, sir; and it might go off and drown itself in that sloppy pond, and then the sperit of Miss Lucy would naturally go down; and bless you, sir, I hain't up to these spiritual things. My grandfather used to say, he liked the sperits that you can keep bottled up; *they* don't give you the shivers when they gets into you. Pretty grave, sir! I planted them violets. The earth do know how to put a good face on the horrors cuddled in its old bosom."

"We thought we'd come down after you, sir," said Mr Fern's voice at that moment.

Mrs. Fern was with him. I made way for her to stand before the stone. Her calm eyes studied the words upon it,

as though they were the features of her daughter [illegible]. Mr. Fern stooped to pick a violet, and he gave it to [illegible].

And in tender silence the fresh spring wind breathed upon our lips the murmurs of its youth, and gently brushed the grave of a young life which had blossomed and died like a flower of spring.

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